

just tell me you love me (i'll give you what i need)

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by Anonymous

Summary

“Promise me you’re going to break up with him,” Ilya says, the teasing edge in his voice fading into something more serious. “I am very selfish, Shane. I do not want to share what is mine.”

Shane nods almost immediately. “Tomorrow,” he breathes out. “I’ll break up with him tomorrow.”

OR

Shane has never been completely certain about his relationship with his boyfriend. There’s always been a sense that something is missing. But when he meets his boyfriend’s coworker, Ilya Rozanov, he finally understands what that missing piece is, and realizes he’s found it in Ilya.

Notes

people: oh, cheating is wrong!!

me: not when my two favs are involved hehe

“You are Shane, yes?”

Shane hesitates. Is he Shane? He supposes he must be. His parents named him Shane; he’s been Shane his whole life, made up of all the small, obedient pieces that fit together to form that name—the dutiful son, the compliant boyfriend, the loyal friend. But he doesn’t know the gorgeous man standing before him so can he really be the Shane that this guy is looking for?

“Uh,” Shane hesitates again, his gaze drifting from the man’s pink lips back up to his blue eyes. “Yes?”

“Are you sure?” the man asks, his voice lilting with an intoxicating Russian accent. He seems amused.

Shane may not always catch the exact meaning behind someone’s words, but he understands tone well enough. He knows mockery when he hears it. The syllables slid under his skin and stayed there.

“Yes,” Shane grits out. His eyes snap instead to the cigarette tucked neatly behind the man’s ear, caught in a crown of blond curls that keeps it from falling. “Are you allowed to smoke here?”

Here being a hospital. More specifically, the ambulance bay of the emergency room. Shane knows exactly why he’s here. He has come to see Mark, his wonderful boyfriend of a year, to have lunch with him during his break. The man beside him, whoever he is, is wearing dark scrubs, which tells Shane he must be a resident just like Mark. But what resident smokes?

The residents Shane knows through Mark treat their bodies like temples. They exercise regularly, eat carefully, and keep their minds sharp. It’s one of the things Mark and Shane bonded over when they met at the gym nearly a year ago.

“Yes and no,” the man answers, plucking the cigarette from behind his ear and placing it between his lips. After rummaging briefly through his pocket, he produces a lighter and flicks it to life, shielding the flame with one hand as he lights it.

“I shouldn’t,” he adds, exhaling slowly, “but I do anyway.”

Shane rolls his eyes. Whatever that means. “What if I were a patient?”

The man smirks around the cigarette. “But you are not.” His blue eyes sharpen slightly. “You are Shane, yes?”

Shane opens his mouth to demand how the hell this stranger knows his name, but before he can speak, he hears someone shouting behind him.

“Shane!”

He turns instinctively toward the double doors of the emergency room just as they swing open, revealing Mark in his hospital scrubs, smiling as he hurries out. The stranger beside Shane, who Shane now realizes has been standing far too close, steps back a pace, drawing deeply on his cigarette.

Shane forces a smile for Mark, even though the thick, acrid smell of smoke makes his nose wrinkle. For reasons he can't quite explain, he suddenly feels as though he's been caught doing something wrong, like a child caught stealing candy. Even though all he was doing was talking to a stranger. A very handsome stranger, his mind adds unhelpfully.

"Hey, babe," Mark says as he approaches, leaning in to press a quick peck to Shane's lips.

Shane lets him. Even though he dislikes almost all forms of PDA, even hand-holding, he doesn't pull away. "Hey," he murmurs.

Mark's attention doesn't linger on him for long. His eyes slide past Shane to the man beside him, who has made no effort to introduce himself. "See you've met Rozanov."

"Hm?" Shane glances back at the stranger, who is still smoking.

The man's eyes never leave him, not even as he lifts the cigarette and takes another slow drag. The stare is steady enough that Shane has to physically force himself to turn his attention back to Mark.

"Yes," the stranger says smoothly, giving a small nod. Shane assumes this must be Rozanov. He settles the cigarette between his lips and steps a little closer to them, blue eyes bright with mischief. "I was just introducing myself."

His gaze fixes on Shane again, so intensely that Shane can feel it against the back of his neck without even looking.

"Mark talks about you all the time," Rozanov continues lazily. "Is annoying, really."

Mark scoffs, shaking his head as he reaches for Shane's hand and squeezes it. "Go back to your rounds, Rozanov."

He gives Shane's hand a tug, pulling him away from the strange gravitational pull of the absurdly handsome Russian.

"Come on, babe," Mark says, already guiding him toward the parking lot. "I've got the coolest story to tell you about a broken hand today."

Shane grimaces. "Gross."

"Come back soon, Mark!" Rozanov calls after them.

They're already halfway across the lot, heading toward Shane's car. Mark doesn't bother looking back. Shane does. The Russian is still standing there, cigarette between his fingers, wearing a bright, gleaming smirk.

“Don’t want you to fall behind!” Rozanov adds.

“Unlikely!” Mark sings back without turning around. “Considering I’m already so far ahead of you!”

Shane swallows and quickly turns his head forward again, looking at Mark.

“Who was that?” he asks quietly once they’re far enough away.

Mark rolls his eyes. “One of the residents. Ilya Rozanov. Total asshole, and unfortunately very intelligent. He’ll be a great doctor if he ever stops being such a dickhead.”

“Oh.” Shane swallows again. Why does it suddenly feel like his throat is tightening? “He seems like an asshole.”

“Oh, that he is,” Mark chuckles, reaching ahead to open the passenger door of Shane’s car. “He and I have a bit of a rivalry, but it’s mostly in good fun.”

“You’re friends?” Shane’s eyes widen. God, he hopes not. He hopes he never sees that man, or those entrancing blue eyes, ever again.

“God, no,” Mark scoffs. “Just some friendly competition.”

Shane stays quiet as he slides into the driver’s seat and starts the car. God damn it. Why are his hands shaking? Why is his heart beating so fast? He’s a good boyfriend. He should stop thinking about it. Stop thinking about him.

No. *No*.

Mark mistakes the silence for something else.

“No need to be jealous,” he says with a chuckle, leaning across the console to plant a quick kiss on Shane’s cheek.

Shane immediately rubs the damp spot away with the back of his hand. “Fuck off,” he chortles weakly.

“Hey.” Mark frowns, looking mildly irritated. “You know I hate when you say that.”

“Sorry.” Shane forces a small, apologetic smile.

He’s apologizing for the swearing, yes, but more than that, he’s apologizing because Ilya’s hands keep flashing through his mind so insistently it feels like a betrayal. His hands in different positions, in different places, all of them dirtier than the last. God, he needs to get laid tonight. By Mark, of course. That’s what this is. He just hasn’t had sex in a while.

Shane takes a steadying breath as he pulls the car out of the parking lot.

God. Please don’t let this turn into anything.

It turns into something. Of fucking course it does.

Every Wednesday, Shane's usual day to visit Mark on his lunch break, Ilya Rozanov is there in the ambulance bay, leaning against the wall and smoking a cigarette. They barely talk really, nothing more than a casual hello or how are you. It's the sort of polite exchange that should mean nothing but even that somehow has Shane blushing.

He hates it. Hates that Ilya has such an effect on him and hates that Mark doesn't. Maybe at first when their relationship was new, when the honeymoon phase made everything feel bright and easy, things were different. But a year in, that feeling had faded.

Shane tries to remain rational. He knows there are ways to avoid this situation entirely. He could go inside the emergency room and wait for Mark at the front desk. But that would mean risking the sight of blood. Or worse, the sight of mangled limbs, frantic families, the sharp antiseptic smell of a hospital. That, Shane tells himself firmly, would be worse than enduring a two-minute conversation with Ilya. Or at least it should be worse.

Lately, though, Shane is starting to suspect that talking to Ilya might actually be the more dangerous option.

Especially today, when the very last thing Shane wants to do is talk to him.

The night before, he and Mark argued again about the same stupid thing they've been arguing about for weeks now; where to go on vacation. Mark wants an all-inclusive resort somewhere warm where they can lie on the beach, tan, and spend an entire week doing nothing but relaxing together. Shane, frankly, thinks that sounds like his worst nightmare. Seven straight days of coarse sand between his toes, dry buffet chicken, and the constant, nagging worry about whatever bacteria might be lurking in the ocean water.

Besides, though he only admits this quietly to himself later, he doesn't think he could handle a trip where all they do is be together. With his idea, a trip through Europe, at least they would be busy visiting museums, taking trains through a new city, and eating great food. It would be less time to sit around and talk. Even thinking that makes Shane wince but he feels it in his bones regardless.

The argument dragged on until late. Eventually Shane stayed over, but they didn't sleep together. That's starting to become a problem too. They haven't slept together in over a week now, and Shane feels wound tight with the frustration of it, restless and irritable and itching for release.

And now here he is, standing outside the ambulance bay while Ilya Rozanov leans opposite of him, casually blowing smoke out through his nose.

Shane feels like his entire body is buzzing with anticipation. God, he's pathetic.

“Uh,” Shane starts, glancing up from his phone. Mark had just texted that he’d be out any second, so there’s no real harm in a bit of small talk. “How’s your shift been so far?”

Ilya shrugs, flicking his cigarette to the ground and grinding it beneath his shoe. Shane watches as the muscles in the man’s calf flex beneath his scrubs while he crushes the ember out. God, why is he imagining Ilya using those muscles to step on his dick? “Eh,” he sighs. “Is fine. You have weak stomach, so I won’t give you all the details.”

“Fuck off,” Shane chortles automatically. He half-expects the familiar reprimand he’d get from Mark, but instead Ilya’s eyes brighten, amusement flickering across his face.

“Mark told us you almost threw up when he cut his finger chopping carrots,” Ilya says, clearly entertained. “Said he didn’t even need stitches and you still looked green.”

He steps a little closer as he speaks, closing some of the space between them.

Shane straightens instinctively. “There was a lot of blood,” he mutters in weak defense.

“Hm.” Ilya nods.

But he isn’t looking at Shane’s eyes. Shane follows the line of his gaze and realizes that Ilya is staring at his mouth. His stomach flips.

“What do you do for work?” Ilya asks casually.

“I, uh...” Shane swallows, trying to moisten his throat that has suddenly gone dry. “I’m doing my articling at a law firm.”

Ilya’s expression shifts immediately, lighting with a kind of crooked amusement.

“Really?” he says. “That makes sense.”

“It does?” Shane asks, frowning slightly.

“Yes.” Ilya nods, taking another step forward.

Now he’s only a few feet away. Shane has the absurd, dizzying urge to lean forward and fall straight into him. God, he needs to get a grip.

“You are very... tense,” Ilya continues, tilting his head as if studying him. “Is part of profession, no?”

Shane scoffs and rolls his shoulders, trying to look less rigid. He wants very badly to point out that it’s actually Ilya making him tense, but he bites the comment back.

“What about you?” Shane shoots back instead. “Aren’t doctors supposed to have good bedside manner?”

“Ah.” Ilya’s mouth curls into a slow smirk. “Trust me, Shane. My manners in bed are impeccable.”

Holy fucking shit.

Shane's mouth falls open. He's already drawing breath, ready to tear into Ilya for flirting so blatantly with someone who is very much taken, but before he can say a word, the sliding doors behind them hiss open.

"Hey, Rozanov," Mark mutters as he walks out.

He barely spares Shane a glance before heading straight past him, clearly expecting Shane to follow. Which, of course, he does.

When they get into Shane's car, Mark starts talking. Well, it's more like lecturing. Shane lets it happen. He sits there with his hands on the steering wheel and takes it quietly. In a way, it feels deserved. A kind of punishment, not just for the argument the night before, but for standing there and letting another man flirt with him like that.

Mark sighs heavily as Shane pulls out of the parking lot.

"I just feel like you've been distant lately," he says, rubbing a hand across his forehead. "And I don't know why."

Shane keeps his eyes on the road.

"You keep dodging the vacation thing," Mark continues, clearly sounding frustrated. "And I get it, okay? You like structure, you like plans. But relationships take compromise. If we actually want to strengthen what we have, we should go somewhere we can just... be together. That's the point of an all-inclusive."

Shane nods slowly. Mark is right. Shane shouldn't be standing outside fantasizing about some Russian asshole who clearly gets a thrill out of flirting with men who are already taken. That's not who Shane is. It's not what he wants.

What he has is Mark, his boyfriend of a year, who is loyal, stable, and successful. Someone who actually wants to build something real with him. Shane needs to focus on that.

"I know," Shane says quietly. "I'll try harder. I'll be more present. I promise."

Mark's shoulders loosen a little at that.

They talk more over lunch that day, sitting at the small café across the street from the hospital. Shane makes an effort; he asks questions, laughs at the right moments, listens when Mark recounts stories from his shift. By the end of the meal they even make a plan. They'll start having lunch together more often.

"Not just Wednesdays," Mark says, sounding pleased. "I can usually sneak away Mondays and Thursdays too if it's not too busy."

Shane smiles and agrees immediately.

He doesn't admit, to Mark or even out loud to himself, that this might be the part he's most excited about. Because more lunches with Mark means more afternoons waiting outside the ambulance bay, which means more chances to see Ilya.

The next time he comes to pick up Mark during his lunch break, Ilya is outside, except he looks... horrible. It's the first word that comes to Shane's mind. His hair, which is usually pushed back and tamed, has fallen loose across his forehead, tangled like he's been dragging his hands through it again and again. He's smoking with a kind of aggression Shane hasn't seen before, taking such harsh drags it almost looks like he's trying to swallow the cigarette whole. Shane notices there are three crushed cigarettes scattered near his shoes. He's been out here a while.

"Ilya?" Shane says as he approaches.

Ilya looks up sharply, clearly startled. It's Thursday. Shane normally only comes on Wednesdays. But Shane barely registers the confusion on his face because up close Ilya looks even worse.

His skin is pale, almost gray, and his eyes are rimmed red. Has he been crying?

"Is everything okay?" Shane asks. He hates how sincere his voice sounds the moment the words leave his mouth. It's a stupid question. Obviously everything is not okay.

"I'm fine," Ilya says quickly, clearing his throat as he exhales smoke through his nose. "Rough shift is all."

"What happened?" Shane is surprised to realize he actually wants to know.

Usually he hates hearing about the grisly things that happen inside the emergency room. When Mark tells stories about work, Shane spends half the time trying not to imagine blood and bone and screaming patients. But with Ilya it's different. He wants to know what's weighing on him. What does his mom always say? A problem shared is a weight lifted? Yeah, something like that.

"Nothing." Ilya shakes his head and flicks the cigarette to the ground, crushing it under his heel.

"No offense," Shane says, forcing a small, gentle smile, "but you look like shit. I doubt it's nothing."

A dark chuckle slips out of Ilya at that. He glances sideways at Shane, and Shane suddenly realizes he's standing much too close. Close enough to see the tiny moles scattered across Ilya's cheek and the startling clarity of his blue eyes. Being near him always feels strange, like standing beside a magnet.

“A patient died,” Ilya says finally. His voice is quieter now. “We were... close, I guess. As close as you can be in the emergency room.” He shrugs, though the motion looks stiff. “That’s it.”

“I’m sorry,” Shane says softly.

For a second he has the overwhelming urge to reach out and touch Ilya’s arm, maybe his shoulder, but he doesn’t. He can’t cross that line.

“How did they die?” Shane asks instead.

Ilya looks down at his feet, clearly debating whether to speak. For a moment, Shane thinks he might not. But then, Ilya exhales slowly and starts talking, still not looking at him. Shane, meanwhile, can’t seem to look anywhere but at him.

“She was a regular patient of mine,” Ilya says quietly. “Came into the emergency room often. She... liked to hurt herself.” Shane notices his jaw tightening. “I kept referring her to mental health resources every time she came in. The last time I saw her I swore it sounded like she was serious about getting help.”

He pauses, dragging a hand down his face. “Today, she overdosed. Died twenty minutes ago.”

“God,” Shane breathes. His stomach twists unpleasantly. “I’m so sorry. That sounds awful.” He hesitates for a second before reaching out. His fingers brush lightly against Ilya’s elbow, the touch soft. “It sounds like you did everything you could.”

“Not enough though,” Ilya sighs, shaking his head. “Is never enough.”

Shane’s hand lingers for a second before he pulls it back. Something about the way Ilya said that makes a strange chill crawl down his spine. The words didn’t sound like they were just about a patient. It sounded... personal. Like Ilya had known someone once who struggled the same way. Or worse, like Ilya himself had been there. The thought makes Shane visibly shiver.

Ilya notices. His red-rimmed eyes lift to Shane’s face. Then they drop briefly to where Shane’s hand had been resting on his arm.

“Thanks,” he says quietly.

“Yeah—” Shane starts.

He wants to say more, though he’s not sure what. Something comforting, maybe, or something kind. But before he can figure it out, the sliding doors hiss open.

“Rozanov!”

Mark steps out with a smirk, completely oblivious to the heavy tension hanging in the air. He walks straight up to them and casually loops an arm around Shane’s waist.

“Rachel says she hasn’t gotten your charts yet.”

Ilya doesn’t look at Mark but he doesn’t look at Shane either. Shane follows his line of sight and realizes Ilya’s gaze is fixed on the spot where Mark’s arm is wrapped around his waist.

“Yeah,” Ilya mutters after a second. His voice sounds flat now. “I’m coming in.” He brushes past them abruptly, as though suddenly disgusted by the entire scene. “Enjoy your lunch.”

“Will do,” Mark says with a smug little grin, already tugging Shane toward the parking lot.

By the time they reach Shane’s car, Shane gently pulls himself free from Mark’s arm.

“Is he okay?” Shane asks.

Mark glances back toward the ambulance bay, but Ilya is already gone. When Mark turns back, he rolls his eyes. “He’s fine,” he grumbles. “Rozanov’s always getting way too attached to patients. Especially the crazy ones.”

“The crazy ones?” Shane repeats, startled. He can’t remember ever hearing Mark talk about mental illness so dismissively.

“Yeah,” Mark shrugs. “He loves the basket cases. Probably because his mom was one.”

Shane feels his stomach drop, something cold and unpleasant settling in his chest. When they get into the car, Mark leans over casually and presses a kiss just beneath Shane’s jaw. Shane has to fight every instinct he has not to pull away.

“So,” Mark says lightly, settling back in his seat. “Where do you wanna eat today?”

Shane stares at the steering wheel for a moment. He doesn’t have the heart to tell Mark that he suddenly isn’t hungry at all.

A week or so later, Shane sees Ilya outside of the hospital for the first time. He was at a grocery store near his apartment, buying ingredients for a dinner he was making for Mark. He’d told Mark it was just to show his appreciation, which Mark had loved, but honestly, it was because Shane needed something to quiet his wandering mind. Lately the guilt had been getting worse. The more he thought about Ilya, the more horrible and sick to his stomach he felt. One incident had included a very vivid wet dream where Ilya had broken into his home through a window and ravaged him. That was enough to send Shane spiraling. So, in a small attempt to make himself feel better about what a terrible boyfriend he was being, he decided to cook Mark his favorite steak and vegetable dish.

He pushed his cart through the meat section, glancing down at the list in his own handwriting as he checked if he’d forgotten anything. He stopped off to the side, staring at the rows of

pre-sliced steaks and debating what ounce to get, a surprisingly difficult decision because Mark was so particular.

That was when he heard his name in a familiar Russian accent.

“Shane?”

Shane froze. The flimsy paper crinkled in his grip as he looked up, his gaze lifting until it landed on Ilya about six feet away. He was carrying a small basket in his hand filled with eggs and bread. Dear God. What was his luck? What were the odds that the subject of his recent wet dream would show up while he was shopping for a romantic dinner for his boyfriend?

“Hey...” Shane gave an awkward wave as Ilya approached, closing the distance between them.

Shane wasn't sure if he should hug him (was that considered cheating?), but Ilya seemed to make the decision for him, stepping forward and giving him a brief hug.

Shane inhaled the faint scent of his cologne, felt the solid muscle beneath his shirt for a moment, and then stepped back, gripping the edge of the steak display like he needed the support.

Ilya leaned his hip against the case a foot or two away, a small smirk tugging at his mouth. “How are you? Haven't seen you in a week or so.”

Shane nodded, clearing his throat. “Yeah. I've been busy with work. Haven't been able to spare the hour break.”

It was kind of a lie but kind of the truth.

He had skipped lunch with Mark a few times lately, mostly because the last time he'd seen Ilya, it had stirred something in him. For the first time, he'd felt bad for him, had caught himself caring about him. And, if he was honest, he'd still been annoyed with Mark after the comments he'd made about Ilya's mom. Shane didn't need the full context to know what Mark had said was wrong, and in that moment he'd felt oddly protective of Ilya. He hadn't told Mark that, of course. He'd just said he was tired, which Mark had accepted without question.

“Oh,” Ilya said, looking slightly concerned. “But you're eating, right? Taking care of yourself?”

Shane felt his heart clench. “Oh, yeah. Of course. It's just busy season, that's all.”

Ilya smirked a little, nodding. “Yes. For me too.”

“Really?” Shane asked. Why did he want to know? Why did he care, when he could barely stay interested when Mark talked about his own day?

“Yes.” Ilya nodded. “The emergency room is always busy during the winter.”

“Oh. Makes sense.” Shane nodded.

There’s a beat of silence between them before Ilya’s eyes drift down Shane’s body and then toward his cart.

“You’re buying steak?” he asked.

“I’m trying to,” Shane said, blushing as he glanced back down at the display of different cuts.

“You’re cooking?” Ilya asked, pushing off the case with his hip and stepping closer to the display. Close enough that Shane suddenly became very aware of the space between them.

“Yes. For Mark and me.” Shane added the last part quickly, though he wasn’t sure why it suddenly felt so important to say.

“Ah.” Ilya nodded, pressing his lips together as he looked down at the steaks. “That’s nice of you.”

“Thanks,” Shane mumbled, following his gaze.

Another brief silence passed before Ilya took a breath and tried again. “Are you, uh, deciding which ounce to get?”

“Yeah.” Shane nodded. “But Mark’s really particular, and I’m not sure which one he’d want.”

Ilya nodded, though something about his expression seemed a little... deflated. Shane felt the sudden urge to reach out and ask if something was wrong, but he didn’t get the chance. Instead, Ilya reached into the display case and picked up an eight-ounce steak, holding it out toward him.

“This one is good,” he said. “Normal size. Easy to cook.” His eyes flicked toward the cart. “Did you buy spices?”

“Yes.” Shane gestured toward the cart. “I grabbed a few.”

Ilya leaned slightly to look inside. “They look good. It will be a nice meal.”

“Thanks.” Shane smiled faintly. “And thanks for your help.”

“Of course.” Ilya looked back at him, his expression soft, almost wistful.

Before Shane could ask what that look meant, an elderly woman approached them. She had steel-rimmed glasses perched on her nose, and she wore a bright, hopeful smile.

“Can one of you boys help me?” she asked.

Both Shane and Ilya turned to her immediately, their expressions warming.

“Of course,” Ilya said first as she stepped closer.

“What can we do?” Shane asked.

She held out a bottle of syrup. “My husband loves syrup with his pancakes, but I need to buy one with low sugar since he’s diabetic. He hates it, but he doesn’t know what’s good for him.”

Shane and Ilya both chuckled, briefly glancing at each other, silently agreeing how adorable the woman was.

“Hm,” Shane said with a knowing nod. “Don’t I know it. This guy”—he gestured toward Ilya—“smokes. I’ve told him it’s bad for him, but he just won’t listen.”

The elderly woman lifted her brows at Ilya. “Is that true?”

Ilya pressed his lips together and shrugged, looking exactly like a kid who’d been caught doing something he shouldn’t. “Yes. Sorry.”

“Well,” the woman said, eyeing him thoughtfully, “I hope all that smoking hasn’t hurt your eyesight, because I need you to read these ingredients for me.”

Ilya nodded politely. “Yes, ma’am.”

Ilya took the bottle from the woman and read over the label silently, his brow furrowing in concentration. Shane watched him, his heart clenching at how strangely adorable he looked. When Ilya finally looked up again, he handed the bottle back. Shane had to shake his head slightly to snap himself out of the little trance he’d fallen into.

“It says low sugar on the back,” Ilya told her, pointing to the label as she took it back.

“Amazing.” She smiled warmly at him. “Thank you.”

“Of course.” Ilya smiled back. “Tell your husband to watch his sugar.”

“I will.” She glanced at Shane. “And you keep working on him about the smoking.” Then she looked back at Ilya. “Your husband is right. It’s horrible for you.”

Shane and Ilya both froze. Neither of them looked at each other.

Holy shit.

In the moment, Shane hadn’t realized what he’d implied. He’d only been trying to be friendly, but now it hit him all at once. What he’d said had made it sound like he and Ilya were married.

Shane opened his mouth, hesitating, ready to correct her but before he could say anything, Ilya spoke.

Ilya hesitated for half a second before nodding. “I know,” he said quietly. “I’m trying to quit.”

The woman smiled approvingly before turning and returning to her cart further down the aisle.

When Ilya stepped back beside him, Shane finally met his eyes. He tried to hide it, but he could feel the heat burning in his cheeks and knew the shock was written all over his face. Ilya, at least, had the decency to look a little embarrassed. Not embarrassed enough to seem sorry for letting the misunderstanding stand.

“She made an honest mistake,” Ilya said with a quiet chuckle, explaining before Shane even had to ask. “It felt rude to correct her.”

“Oh.” Shane nodded slowly. He supposed that made sense. “Okay.”

A pause hung between them.

“Is that weird?” Ilya asked suddenly, his eyes wide in a way that looked almost... worried.

Shane realized then that Ilya looked a little scared, like he was waiting for Shane to react badly. And for some reason, Shane immediately wanted to ease that tension.

“No, no,” Shane said quickly. “It’s okay.” He gave a small shrug, trying to make light of it. “Besides... kind of a compliment to me, if you think about it. You’re so good-looking that if she thinks we’re together, she must think I wouldn’t be punching above my weight.”

The moment the words left his mouth, Shane winced. God, that sounded weird. Surely that was weird. Surely Ilya was going to remind him that Shane had a boyfriend, that he loved Mark, that he was committed to Mark. But he didn’t. Instead, Ilya just smirked, something bright flickering in his eyes as he looked at him.

“You’d never be punching above your weight,” Ilya said. He said it so seriously it almost startled Shane.

“Thanks,” Shane muttered, blushing so hard now he could barely form words. He looked away, desperate to find an excuse to escape before he completely combusted. “I, uh... I should go. I need to start cooking.”

“Right.” Ilya nodded, glancing back at his cart. “See you.”

“See you,” Shane said automatically, focusing more on breathing and putting one foot in front of the other than on what he was actually saying.

God, he was so fucked.

Shane didn’t get any *less* fucked a week later, when he and Mark get invited out by some of Mark’s hospital coworkers to a bar called Jacob’s.

Shane knows the place well enough; it’s a small, cozy little gay bar tucked into Toronto’s Village. Mark, who loves drinking, loves loud music, loves any excuse to be out late, had sold it to Shane as a great time. He’d even insisted it would be good for Shane to get to know

his coworkers better, to actually bond with them. Shane had almost told him he'd already met *more than enough* of Mark's coworkers.

The real reason he doesn't want to go tonight is Ilya, plain and simple. Ilya, who Shane had seen outside of scrubs for the first time and had nearly lost his damn mind over. Ilya, who has crept into Shane's thoughts like a slow-acting poison, spreading through him day by day until Shane can barely remember what his life felt like before meeting him. Ilya, who has only flirted with him a handful of times and yet somehow has Shane hanging on every word, every glance, every stupid crooked smirk like the most pathetic man alive.

But Shane can't explain any of that to Mark. So in the end, he just agrees to go.

Jacob's is already loud when they arrive. The bass from the music hums through the floor, the bar glowing in dim purples and reds, little clusters of people gathered around small tables or pressed up against the counter with drinks in hand. Shane can smell beer, cologne, and something vaguely sour the moment they step inside.

Mark seems immediately energized by it. "Oh good, they're here already," he says, squeezing Shane's shoulder before steering him deeper into the bar.

Shane barely hears him, because of course the first person he sees is Ilya.

He's leaning against the bar about twenty feet away, one elbow propped casually on the counter. He's wearing a pair of dark jeans and a charcoal sweater pushed up slightly at the sleeves, revealing strong forearms. Ilya's hair is slightly messy like he's run a hand through it too many times and there's a drink in his hand as he talks to one of Mark's coworkers. Dear God. He looks divine.

"Hey," Mark says, tugging lightly at Shane's sleeve. "They grabbed a table in the back."

"Yeah," Shane says quickly, dragging his eyes away from the bar.

Don't look at him. Don't even *think* about him. It is a mantra he's been telling himself from the moment he met Ilya. It has yet to work.

Shane forces himself to focus on Mark as they walk toward the back where a few of Mark's coworkers are already waving them over. He smiles, sits down beside Mark, accepts the water Mark's coworker and friend, Rose, slides toward him.

The conversation flows easily after that. Rose asks Shane about work, which somehow turns into a whole thread of stories, first about her shifts, then about Mark's, then about the strange cases people have seen lately. Before he knows it, Shane is smiling, actually laughing along with them. He meets Scott, a cardiologist who is mentoring Mark and the other residents, and Scott's husband Kip. They're warm in a way that immediately puts Shane at ease; they're open, curious, asking him questions about his job with genuine interest. More interest, if he's being honest with himself, than Mark has ever really shown.

Shane knows that's not entirely fair. Law isn't exactly a thrilling dinner conversation, especially compared to emergency medicine. There's no dramatic life-or-death stories, no

heroic moments. It's just mostly paperwork, negotiations, contracts, and numbers. Still, the way Scott and Kip ask Shane questions, makes him feel like his job is important enough.

The people at the table are kind, funny, easy to talk to, and despite the music thumping through the walls and the press of bodies around the bar, Shane actually feels happy tonight.

There's just one problem. It's just... well there's this itch Shane gets. He thinks it's because of the music and the sour smell of sweat and he itches it once, twice, three times. He tries taking another sip of his water, tries rolling his shoulders to ease the tension, but nothing works. And then, because he is a traitor to even himself, Shane turns his head. The moment his eyes lock with Ilya's across the bar, the itch disappears.

Ilya is still leaning against the counter, exactly where Shane had first seen him. His eyes are fixed on Shane like they've been there the entire time. When Shane looks at him, Ilya has the decency to glance away for a second, like he's been caught doing something he shouldn't.

Shane quickly turns back to the table. Scott is halfway through telling a story about the renovation he and Kip are doing on their house, something about a contractor who keeps mismeasuring the kitchen cabinets. Shane nods along, trying to focus, but he can't help himself. He glances again.

Ilya is no longer at the bar. He's moving toward their table. Shane straightens immediately, turning his body more toward Mark, who's sitting beside him with his arm draped casually along the back of the booth.

There's an empty space on Shane's other side, and Shane suddenly begins praying to God, to the universe, to literally anyone listening, that Ilya does not sit there. Shane is not that lucky.

"Hello," Ilya sings as he approaches, a glass of straight vodka in his hand. Really leaning into the stereotype, Shane thinks faintly. "Mind if I join?"

"Of course not!" Rose says brightly before anyone else can respond, gesturing toward the empty space. Ilya slides into the booth beside Shane. "Scott was just telling us how the reno is going."

"Ah." Ilya slouches back into the seat, stretching his legs out under the table. Shane feels the solid warmth of Ilya's thigh pressing against his own. His whole body goes rigid. "Is going like shit, right?"

"Fuck off, Rozanov," Scott says, rolling his eyes, but there's a faint smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, and Shane gets the impression that despite the jab, Scott actually respects him.

Scott continues with his story, and Shane forces himself to follow along. Every so often he offers a smile or a small laugh when the rest of the table does. It's difficult to think, let alone breathe, with Ilya so close but he manages. Halfway through Scott's story, while everyone else seems completely absorbed in the conversation Shane has barely been listening to, Ilya leans in.

His voice brushes against Shane's ear as he whispers, "How was the steak?"

Shane snaps his head toward him, his whole body shivering, not just from the warmth of Ilya's breath against his neck, but from the sudden spike of panic that someone else might have heard.

"What?"

"The steak you cooked," Ilya clarifies quietly. "Was good, yes?"

"Oh." Shane exhales softly, lowering his voice while Rose continues talking across the table. "Yes. It was good. Mark liked it."

"Good." Ilya nods, lifting his glass for a sip of vodka, but his eyes never leave Shane. "You are a good boyfriend." It's supposed to be a compliment but it doesn't sound like one coming out of Ilya's mouth.

"Thanks," Shane swallows harshly. God, not enough water in the world could quench his thirst right now.

Ilya takes another sip of his vodka and when he sets the glass back down, his gaze flicks toward Shane's water. "You do not drink. Why?"

Shane shrugs, glancing nervously toward the rest of the table again. Is this strange? Having this side conversation while everyone else talks? Is someone going to notice? Or is he just overthinking like always?

"I do sometimes."

"Mark says you don't." Ilya smirks, clearly teasing.

Shane's brows knit together. Since when do Mark and Ilya talk about him? And more importantly, what else do they say?

"It's just not for me," Shane clarifies, slightly annoyed. "I don't like the taste. Or how it makes me feel." He pauses, then adds before he can stop himself, "Besides, you of all people should know it's not exactly good for you."

"Ah, yes," he says lightly. "Not great for you. But neither is smoking."

"Which you also do."

"Yes." Ilya presses his lips together like he's trying not to laugh.

The look he gives Shane is almost fond, like he's entertained by Shane's obvious disapproval, and something about it sends a quiet hum through Shane's chest.

"Does it annoy you," Ilya asks, tilting his head slightly, "that I do these things?"

“No,” Shane lies, and judging by the look on Ilya’s face, he doesn’t believe it for a second. “You can do whatever you want. It’s your body.”

“You told the old lady in the grocery store that you wanted me to quit,” Ilya teases, and Shane prays no one hears that comment. He never told Mark he ran into Ilya.

“Well, I do,” Shane shoots back, a little too quickly.

“Why do you care?” Ilya asks, amused.

“I just said I don’t.”

“You know,” Ilya murmurs thoughtfully, lifting his glass again, “You are very cute when you are annoyed with me.” He finishes the vodka in one swallow.

Shane’s eyes widen. Holy shit.

“What is your problem?” he blurts, standing abruptly.

The entire booth falls silent. Shane realizes too late that everyone is now staring at him. He turns quickly, looking down at Mark, who looks lost.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” he says stiffly. Then he looks down at Ilya, who is staring up at him now with slightly widened eyes. “Can you move?” Shane says sharply.

Ilya shifts immediately, sliding out of the booth without a word. Shane barely waits for the space to clear before stepping past him. He can feel eyes on his back as he leaves the table—Rose’s confused expression, Scott’s raised brows, Mark probably wondering what the hell just happened.

The hallway to the bathrooms is quieter, the music muffled behind the thick wall. Shane pushes through the bathroom door and grips the edge of the sink the moment he’s inside.

“Get a grip,” he mutters under his breath, looking into the mirror. His cheeks are flushed. His hair is slightly messy from running his hands through it all night. He looks... rattled.

Shane exhales slowly, forcing his shoulders to relax. This is ridiculous. It’s just Ilya. Just a guy. A coworker of Mark’s who happens to flirt a little too much and stand a little too close and Shane can handle that. Mark is his boyfriend. Mark, who invited him tonight. Mark, who’s sitting back at that table probably wondering why Shane just stormed off like a lunatic.

“You’re fine,” he says quietly. “You’re going back out there, sitting next to your boyfriend, and you’re going to behave like a normal person.”

Just as the words leave his mouth, the bathroom door creaks open behind him.

Shane’s heart jumps. For a split second he hopes it’s Mark coming to check on him. But when he lifts his head and sees Ilya in the doorway instead, a groan slips out of him before he can stop it.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me...” Shane mutters, straightening and turning back toward the mirror.

“Look, Shane,” Ilya starts. He actually looks a little apologetic, his hands loosely folded in front of him. “I am very drunk right now. More drunk than I thought—”

“God,” Shane groans, gripping the edge of the counter as his hands begin to shake. The words spill out before he can stop them. The careful filter he’s held onto since the day he met Ilya finally snaps.

“Please just shut up,” Shane says, his voice cracking with frustration. “Do you have any idea how hard it is for me when you’re around? I can barely think. I can barely breathe when you’re near me. It doesn’t help that every single time I see you, you’re so—” He cuts himself off abruptly. What is he supposed to say? Beautiful? Gorgeous? Those words feel completely inadequate.

“Look,” Shane exhales, forcing himself to meet Ilya’s unreadable expression. “I know this is all some kind of game for you. Some way to prove to yourself you’re still hot shit. But I have Mark. Someone who actually wants to be with me. And I can’t focus on him when you’re constantly getting in my head. So just leave me alone.”

Shane lets out a sharp breath and brushes past him, shoulder bumping Ilya’s as he pushes through the door.

Back at the table, he forces a thin smile and tells everyone he isn’t feeling well and he wants to go home. Mark, already properly drunk, doesn’t argue much. He just slings an arm around Shane’s shoulders and lets himself be guided out of the bar.

Shane is grateful for that. The entire drive back to Mark’s place, Shane’s body hums with restless adrenaline. His fingers tighten around the steering wheel as he tries to take slow, steady breaths. He keeps telling himself to calm down, to let it go. But who is he kidding? There’s no such thing as relaxing when Ilya Rozanov is involved.

If Shane was going to be honest with himself, everything changes right before Christmas at the hospital’s annual holiday party. He had seen Ilya less and less since that night at Jacob’s but his brain, his body, have more than made up for that absence. He thinks about him constantly.

He wakes in the morning and immediately wonders what Ilya is doing, whether he’s already at the hospital. He wonders what he’s wearing to work that day; those dark green scrubs or the navy ones Shane secretly prefers. During the day, while Shane sits hunched over contracts and client accounts, his mind drifts. He imagines Ilya moving through the emergency room, giving some frightened patient that easy smirk that somehow calms people down. He pictures him leaning over a chart, brow furrowed in concentration, carefully writing notes or considering diagnoses that might ease someone’s pain.

God, for reasons Shane can't fully explain, the thought of that is unbelievably attractive to him.

Later in the evening, when Shane gets home and starts cooking dinner, his mind wanders again. Is Ilya home yet too? Is he showering after his shift? Or does he eat first?

And then, when Shane finally climbs into bed at night, his thoughts slip into far more dangerous territory. He wonders if Ilya sleeps naked or in briefs like Shane. He imagines the warmth of his body pressed against Shane's in the dark.

It's worse on the nights Shane stays over at Mark's apartment. They kiss, touch, and all Shane can picture, over and over again, is Ilya in Mark's place. Even on nights they fuck, when Mark is railing Shane from behind, Shane closes his eyes and pictures it is Ilya instead. The worst part is that he barely feels guilty at all anymore.

It all comes to a head at the hospital's annual holiday party just before Christmas. Mark asks Shane to come with him. He asks several times, actually, until it starts sounding a little like begging. Shane hesitates. Ilya will be there and while a part of him feels a rush of excitement at the idea of seeing him again, another part of him knows that's exactly why he shouldn't go.

If he were smart, he'd be doing everything possible to distance himself from Ilya. He should be focusing on being a good boyfriend, on planning the all-inclusive trip Mark keeps talking about, not fantasizing about what it might feel like if Ilya pinned him against the cold brick wall of the ambulance bay and kissed him.

Eventually, Shane agrees to go because refusing would only be stranger. So, like the strategist he is, he concocts a plan in his head: put on a nice suit, smile through the evening, and grit his teeth if he has to. Just don't look at Ilya, don't even think about him. Stick to Mark like glue if necessary. Keep your eyes and your mind on your boyfriend. That's the plan.

It falls apart almost immediately. Shane spots Ilya the second they walk into the small banquet hall the hospital has rented. So much for keeping his eyes on Mark.

To be fair, Ilya is... hard to miss. He's wearing all black; a perfectly fitted blazer, sleek dress pants, and a silk black dress shirt with the top few buttons undone. The open collar reveals a hint of blond hair across his chest.

Shane swallows harshly the moment he spots him. Dear God, the man looks like walking sex. Without thinking, Shane reaches up and loosens one of the buttons at his own collar.

"You hot?" Mark asks, returning to the table with two flutes of champagne.

"Uh, yeah." Shane forces a smile as he takes one of them. He downs half the glass immediately, grimacing at the sharp taste.

"Slow down there," Mark laughs, settling into the chair beside him. His hand lands casually on Shane's thigh while he takes a slow sip from his own drink. "Don't wanna get sloshed before the food."

“I know,” Shane says lightly.

His gaze drifts past Mark’s shoulder. Ilya is standing a few tables away, chatting with someone Shane vaguely recognizes as one of the emergency room nurses. A small, ugly twist of jealousy coils in Shane’s chest. He hates it immediately. It’s ridiculous, not to mention completely unwarranted. He’s here with his boyfriend for God’s sake.

Thankfully, Ilya doesn’t approach their table which is good, actually. Great, even. Maybe he’ll finally leave Shane alone like he asked.

His seat is a few tables away, and once the food starts arriving, Shane can’t really see him anymore. Shane nods to himself, deciding this is probably for the best. He came here to spend time with Mark, not to stare across the room at Ilya. Besides, Ilya seemed pretty absorbed in conversation with that nurse. Good. Maybe that means he isn’t even interested in Shane anymore. That would be better. Shane has Mark, who is kind and loyal and stable. Ilya can have the pretty nurse who probably suits him just fine. Everything lines up perfectly that way. So it’s all good. Fine, really.

That is, until Mark gets drunk.

Shane isn’t exactly counting his drinks, especially since last time he tried to keep track Mark had gotten very irritated. But even without counting, Shane notices. He had two flutes of champagne before the food even arrived, then a rum and coke once the plates started coming out, and another one not long after the entrées were cleared. Shane feels a flicker of annoyance. It’s hard not to notice the hypocrisy. Mark had warned him about drinking too fast earlier, and now he’s the one getting steadily drunk. But Shane knows how this works. Mark doesn’t want Shane drunk because someone has to stay sober enough to look after him.

By the time the plates are cleared and the music starts, people begin drifting toward the dance floor in excited clusters. Mark stands abruptly. He wobbles a little as he pushes his chair back and grabs Shane’s hand, tugging him upward.

“Come on,” Mark says, already trying to pull him toward the crowd.

Shane shakes his head immediately, slipping his hand free.

“I’m okay,” he says quickly, forcing a polite smile as heat creeps into his cheeks. “You go. I’ll watch you.”

Mark pouts, swaying slightly where he stands.

“Come on! It’s fun,” he insists. “You never dance.”

Shane chuckles weakly, though his pulse is already starting to spike. He hates dancing like this. Hated the loud bass, hated how overwhelmed he felt but more than that, and he hated when Mark pointed it out. It makes him feel like an outsider, like there’s something wrong with him.

“I’m okay, Mark,” Shane says again, a little firmer this time. He gestures toward the dance floor where a group of Mark’s coworkers are already moving to the music. “Rose looks like she’s having fun. Why don’t you—”

“God,” Mark groans, rolling his eyes. “Whatever. You’re no fun.” He turns away, already heading toward the crowd. And just before the music swallows the rest of his words, Shane hears him mutter under his breath: “No wonder we fuck like old people.”

The words hit Shane like a punch. His breath catches sharply in his throat, and he barely manages to swallow the whimper threatening to escape. He knows that part of their relationship isn’t great. He knows the spark has been fading for a while. But hearing Mark throw it back in his face like that hurts more than he can put into words. It makes him feel like the boring, awkward person he’s always secretly worried he is.

Shane blinks hard, trying to keep the tears from spilling over. *Don’t cry, don’t cry.* God, he was going to cry.

Suddenly he stands from the table. Mark is already laughing and dancing with his friends, completely absorbed in the music. No one notices when Shane slips away. He pushes past a few people on his way toward the exit, but his vision is blurring now, the tears threatening to spill over no matter how hard he tries to hold them back. *Please don’t let anyone see.*

There has to be a bathroom somewhere, or maybe a quiet office where he can hide for a few minutes, cry it out, and come back like nothing happened. Just outside the hall, he spots a winding staircase and he climbs it quickly, his steps clumsy as he tries to steady his breathing and blink the tears away. He tries the first door he sees and yanks it open before closing it behind him.

He doesn’t want to cry. He shouldn’t be crying. Mark is just being honest. Sure, he could have said it a little nicer, but that’s just Mark. He’s blunt to the point it sometimes stings. Shane could take it better if he just loosened up, accepted the truth, stopped twisting it into some personal attack.

Don’t cry. Don’t cry.

He leans over the small counter, trying to steady his ragged breaths, fists pressed lightly against the smooth wood. He frowns and finally lifts his head.

Oh, shit. He’s in the coat check closet. It’s cozy, if not a bit cramped, the room dark without the light on. To his right, a row of winter coats hangs, the thick fabrics warm and oddly comforting. For a few minutes, he could calm down here, collect himself, and go back to the party like nothing happened.

Except he doesn’t get those few minutes. He gets about two more seconds before the doorknob turns and Ilya Rozanov walks in.

No. Dear God, no.

“Shane?” Ilya’s voice cuts through the tiny room, calm but low, as he flicks on the dim light. Shane straightens quickly, trying to wipe his eyes. *Look normal*, his brain screams. “Are you okay?”

“‘M fine,” Shane mumbles, sniffing and wiping his nose, voice tight. “Go back to the party. I’m fine.” He doesn’t know who he is fooling. He does not sound fine.

Ilya stares at him like he can see straight through his lie. Shane can feel it crawling under his skin, the intensity of the gaze making his own cheeks heat up. It certainly doesn’t help that up close, Ilya is even more impossibly handsome. God, why does he have to look so composed, so flawless, when Shane is a mess?

“I’m going to say the same thing you said to me,” Ilya offers, small, almost teasing, smile. “No offense, but you look like shit.”

Shane lets out a wet laugh, sniffing again. “Fuck off,” he murmurs, but there’s no bite in it.

Ilya tilts his head, scanning Shane carefully. “Did something—” He hesitates, like he’s trying to phrase whatever he’s about to say lightly. “Did Mark say something?”

Shane is immediately on the defensive. His face crumples in exaggerated confusion, overselling it badly.

“What? No. I just—” He sighs, grasping at a weak excuse. “These types of parties aren’t really my thing. You know... crowds. I get... nervous. It’s really fine—”

“Stop saying it’s fine if it’s not,” Ilya interrupts sharply, so serious Shane almost laughs. He sounds angry, not at Shane, but at... well, probably Mark. “Did Mark do something?”

“God.” Shane forces out a thin laugh, voice cracking slightly. “No, Ilya. Mark didn’t *do* anything. He’s... he’s a great boyfriend. He’s loving, kind, and loyal. He would never hurt me on purpose.”

“Then why are you crying?” Ilya asks simply.

“I told you,” Shane grits out, clasp his hands tightly, feeling trapped in the small space. He needs to leave before he does or says something reckless but Ilya is blocking the exit. He could push past him, sure, but that would mean getting too close. “I’m just overwhelmed.”

“You are a really bad liar,” Ilya says, shaking his head, a thin smile tugging at his lips, disbelief clear in every line of his face.

“Fuck off,” Shane snaps back, irritation bubbling over. Third degree questioning from Ilya is not something he wants today. “Besides, why do you even care?”

Ilya leans slightly closer, eyes catching his. They’re so blue, so focused, and Shane feels a pulse of heat he can’t control. “You know why.”

Shane’s face falls, and he stumbles a step back, colliding with the wall behind him. “Stop talking,” he says, voice tight, breath catching in his chest.

Ilya doesn't seem to hear him, or maybe he does, but he's clearly pressing on. Shane can see the way he's bracing himself, as if he's building courage for something, and Shane is fucking terrified. "Shane, you must know by now—"

"Ilya, stop." Shane shakes his head, trying to anchor himself as Ilya edges forward, closer than ever.

"You must know it's more than coincidence that I'm outside smoking every time you come to pick Mark up—" Ilya closes the distance, close enough that Shane can smell the sharp, clean scent of his cologne.

"Shut up," Shane hisses, stomach swooping, heart hammering against his ribs.

"I know you don't know me that well," Ilya continues, voice low and urgent, "but I like you a lot, Shane—" He pauses, and Shane thinks maybe he's going to stop, but then he doesn't. "Maybe more than I can say. And yes, I know it's asshole behaviour, saying this to you while you're with Mark, and yes, I know you keep saying you're happy, but last time we spoke I thought... maybe... you, I don't know—" Ilya exhales sharply, running a hand through his disheveled hair, and Shane's jaw drops. "English is very hard for me right now."

Shane stares at him, disbelief freezing him in place. Is he in a soap opera? Is this actually happening in his life? Does Ilya actually like him? He hasn't just been flirting with Shane for fun? He can feel his pulse racing, his brain screaming at him to run, to resist, to do anything but what he wants to do.

"How..." Shane's voice cracks, trailing off. His eyes flicker to Ilya's lips before snapping back to his impossibly blue eyes. "How can I trust you?"

"You think I'd fuck up my job for you if I wasn't serious?" Ilya raises an eyebrow, a small, almost cocky smirk tugging at his lips. "You think I'd risk Mark kicking my ass if I wasn't serious?"

Shane hesitates. He knows Ilya is being nice when he brings up Mark. There's no contest, Ilya is stronger but still, hearing those words make his stomach flips anyway. God. Fucking. Damnit. He's spent so long trying to be a good person, trying to do everything right, to be loyal, to be safe. But right now... right now he doesn't care. Being a good person all the time is overrated. Sometimes he's allowed to be selfish.

And so he does the most selfish, reckless thing he can think of. He throws himself forward, arms wrapping themselves around Ilya's neck, pulling him close, before pressing their lips together in a searing, desperate kiss.

Ilya responds almost immediately, his lips moving over Shane's confidently. Shane melts against him, every rational thought collapsing into the press of Ilya's body. His hands clutch at Ilya's shoulders, needing the contact, needing to feel the firmness of his body.

Ilya tilts his head, deepening the kiss, tongue tracing Shane's lips before sliding in, tasting him. Shane shudders, his back pressing against the hard surface of the wall, and the sound of his gasp is swallowed by Ilya's mouth.

God, he's never been kissed like this in his life. Not Mark, or any of his other boyfriends for that matter, have come close to making Shane feel as dizzy, as unmoored as Ilya is making him feel right now.

"I... Ilya—" Shane breathes against the kiss, words barely audible, lost somewhere between desperation and need.

Ilya hums against his lips, pulling back just enough to smirk, eyes dark, electric. "Shh," he murmurs, pressing Shane harder into the wall, "don't talk."

And then, without breaking contact, Ilya leans down, pressing their foreheads together, still close enough that every breath, every heartbeat is shared. Shane's hands slide up to tangle in Ilya's hair, tugging lightly, silently begging. His eyes shine when he looks up at him, full of things he wants to say but can't quite name. The words sit somewhere deep in his chest, too big and too dangerous to let out. His whole body is trembling and he knows if he tries to speak, his voice will betray him just as badly. Ilya seems to read his mind though.

"Hm," Ilya hums, smirking against Shane's mouth as he licks his teeth. "If you want me to get on this floor and suck your dick, you're going to have to beg."

Shane exhales shakily. Somewhere, distantly, he wonders when his self-respect packed its bags and left the building. But he doesn't move away.

"Please," he breathes again, softer this time. "Get on your knees. Please."

"And do what?" Ilya asks, teasing, the edge of a grin playing at his mouth.

Shane's eyes flash. "Suck my dick," he shoots back, more bite than he feels.

Ilya sinks to his knees in front of Shane and well... Shane distantly realizes he should have broken up with Mark months ago. Really should have never dated him, because he has never been this hard for Mark, not even when they first started dating. Ilya's hands go to the buttons on his dress pants, hastily undoing them before pulling them down and Shane has to look away or else he's going to cum.

He looks back down and Ilya is nuzzling the bulge in Shane's briefs. "Tell me why you deserve my mouth."

Shane's eyes are hooded, desire swirling behind them. "Ilya..." he sighs, crying out as Ilya pulls down his briefs too and his cock bobs in the air. "Please, I need you."

"Beautiful cock," Ilya muses, peppering kisses on his thigh, all the way up to his hip but never touching his cock. "Tell me, does your boyfriend suck your cock? Hm?"

Shane's cheeks are already burning, but somehow Ilya manages to make them burn even hotter. God, now this was a sore subject. Mark did not suck Shane's cock often. In fact, he refused sometimes, saying it was gross. Shane hadn't had his cock sucked in a few months. Could be why he was itching for it right now. That and the fact that he had the man of all his wet dreams kneeling before him.

“N-not a lot,” Shane stutters out, his hand coming down to tangle in Ilya’s blonde curls.

“Shame,” Ilya smirks, and Shane watches his cock twitch. “You should break up with him for this.”

“Ilya—” Shane begins to scold but is cut off almost instantly as Ilya’s tongue comes up to lick the head of his cock.

Ilya places one of his hands at the base of Shane’s cock and the other sneaks up the front of Shane’s body. He grips Shane’s pec, rubbing soft circles around his nipple through his dress shirt. When he takes the tip of Shane’s cock in his mouth, Shane throws his head back so forcefully that he’s sure he’s given himself a concussion. Ilya swirls his tongue at the head and then begins taking Shane deeper and deeper in his mouth, gagging on him just a bit, just enough to drive Shane to madness, before he pulls off completely.

“You make me crazy,” Ilya murmurs, the words muffled slightly where his lips are still against Shane’s cock. “Like... obsessed.”

Shane lets out a shaky laugh, emotion climbing up his throat unexpectedly. “Fuck off.”

His laughter, however breathless, is cut off once again when Ilya takes him in his mouth again and begins bobbing his head at an alarming pace. Shane’s breath is once again knocked out of him and he can *feel* Ilya hum against his cock. If Shane didn’t know any better, it feels like Ilya gets off on knocking the wind out of him.

“Oh, fuck—” Shane moans, his eyes wide as he continues to guide Ilya’s mouth down on his cock. Not that he needs much guidance. This man is a pro at sucking cock. “Ilya—” Shane tries again but cuts himself off with another moan.

“Fucking moan for me,” Ilya says as he comes back up for air, both of his hands now coming to the back of Shane’s thighs so he can take him further. “Tell everyone, especially your stupid fucking boyfriend, who is making you feel good.”

“I can’t—oh fuck—” Shane moans out and it’s a sound that comes from his gut, almost like he’s in pain, except it’s not pain at all. It’s a pleasure so overwhelming Shane’s knees practically give out. He can think of nothing else except Ilya and his hot, wet mouth and how he is moments away from cumming.

“Ilya, I’m gonna—” Shane sucks in a sharp breath, watching Ilya take him right down to the base, his hot tongue licking the underside of him. It’s fucking pornographic frankly, with strings of spit visible on Shane’s cock every time Ilya bobs his head. “*Oh, fuck, fuck—*”

And then he’s cumming, those last expletives the only warning for Ilya before Shane cums down his throat.

Shane tries to catch his breath afterwards, his heading spinning, his body light like a helium balloon climbing up, up, up in the sky with no tether. He’s vaguely aware of Ilya helping him pull his pants up but other than that, he’s gone slack against the wall. The thing that finally pulls him back to earth is Ilya of course, who kisses him so fiercely that it jolts Shane right

out of his trance. He tastes himself on Ilya's tongue but it only makes him moan into the kiss harder.

When they finally break apart, Ilya is holding Shane's chin between his fingers, steadying him. Shane looks up at him through damp lashes, breathing unevenly. "You have a decision to make."

Shane exhales, the reality of what just happened crashing down on him. Holy shit. Holy fucking shit. His relationship with Mark is over. He just cheated on him. "I know."

"Okay," Ilya straightens up, adjusting Shane's collar just a bit before reaching up to smooth his hair too. Shane can only imagine how fucked out he looks. "You should go back downstairs before anyone sees. Talk to Mark, then we can talk. Yes?" He pauses, lips twitching faintly. "Just... maybe not here. He might want to fight me."

Shane looks at Ilya seriously. "What should I even say?"

"Say I made you cum so good you lost your last braincell."

"Fuck you," Shane scoffs, his hands coming up to flatten Ilya's curls which he had been violently tugging on.

"Hm, soon." Ilya murmurs, leaning down to give him one last quick kiss. "But only after you take me on a proper date."

Shane belly flips. Jesus Christ. He's pretty sure he might actually be hard again. "Okay. I'll see you soon, I guess."

"If you're lucky." Ilya watches him with hooded eyes as Shane finally steps away, touching his burning cheeks.

On his way back toward the hall, Shane passes a mirror and stops for a second to inspect himself. His hair is a little messy, his collar slightly crooked, but otherwise he doesn't look much different. He feels different, though.

When he returns to the table, Mark is slumped forward with his head resting on his arms. Rose stands beside him, rubbing slow circles across his back. When Shane approaches, she frowns slightly, and his heart jumps into his throat.

"What?" he asks.

"I think your boyfriend drank a bit too much," Rose says awkwardly, gesturing toward Mark.

"Oh." Shane nods slowly. Right. Of course. "I'll bring the car around."

Rose nods, though she hesitates before stepping away. "You good, Shane?"

Shane takes a slow breath. "Yeah," he says. "I'm great."

Shane avoids the conflict he knows is coming. He wants to tell Mark the truth; not just that he cheated, or with whom, but that he's been unhappy for a long time. Because if he's being honest with himself, he has been. Mark isn't a bad person. He's made mistakes, sure, but they just aren't compatible. Even before Ilya, Shane had never felt fully certain about their relationship. There was always something missing and that should have been the sign that it was never going to work. But Shane held onto hope anyway.

Until he met Ilya. Now he knows for sure that whatever he feels for Ilya even in his pinkie, is bigger than whatever he feels for Mark. The hard part is saying it. Because saying it will hurt Mark and Mark will hate him. Shane can't stand the thought of that.

He's spent his whole life being liked, shaping himself into whatever version people seemed to want, softening his edges so no one would have a reason to dislike him. The idea of Mark looking at him with anger, with disgust, makes Shane's stomach churn. So, he avoids Mark. He is not proud of it but he's not proud of what he's done either. The things he wants to say to Mark sit heavy in his chest, waiting to be said, but the work of putting what he feels into language is so hard. It always has been for him.

Four whole days pass before he finally works up the nerve to text Mark, whose messages he's been dodging for far too long. Mark is understandably upset, confused too, and he wants to see Shane right away. Shane tells him he'll pick him up from work that day so they can talk and that seems to reassure Mark enough that he stops texting for the rest of the work day.

When Shane pulls into the hospital parking lot, it's fairly empty. He makes sure to park in the back. He wants to avoid Ilya; seeing him would only confuse him more, and he needs a clear head if he's going to have this conversation with Mark. Besides, he's been dodging Ilya's texts too. He isn't even sure how Ilya got his number, but he knows it's him. Two days ago, a random number texted him: *Have you told him yet?*

Mark is supposed to finish his shift at seven, and Shane arrives right on time. He waits in his car in the far corner of the parking lot, parked beneath the low branches of a tree. Three minutes pass, then another five, then another ten. Shane checks the time again.

7:30 p.m.

He rolls his eyes, climbing out of the car and slamming the door shut. He's already tapping on Mark's contact before he thinks better of it.

"Hello?" Mark answers, sounding confused.

"Yeah," Shane grits out. "Did you forget I'm picking you up?"

"Oh, shoot! Shane, I'm so sorry!" Mark says. "Rose wanted to get drinks after our shift, and I'm already in an uber on the way to Jacob's. You're more than welcome to join us though!" Mark giggles, already sounding a little drunk, which annoys the hell out of Shane.

“No, thanks,” Shane grumbles. He knows he has no right to be angry when he’s the one who cheated on his boyfriend, but the irritation bubbles up anyway. “Are you free tomorrow? We really need to talk.”

“Ooh,” Mark giggles. “Sounds serious. I am free though. Come by mine around nine-ish?”

“Okay. Bye.” Shane hangs up before waiting for a response.

Shane stares at his phone and a minute or two passes. The adrenaline still buzzing through his body makes it hard to sit still. His legs are jittery, fingers tapping against his legs. He should have told Mark already. God, he should have told him yesterday. Instead, he’s here again, putting it off and letting the truth sit inside his chest. It feels like it could spill out of him at any moment, right here in the quiet parking lot.

He rolls his shoulders, trying to shake off the tension before climbing back into his car. The drive home is silent. He doesn’t bother playing any music or listening to the radio.

When he gets home, he tries to busy himself. He cooks something simple he barely tastes and cleans the kitchen afterward, wipes down the counters, organizes things that don’t really need organizing. Anything to burn off the nervous energy vibrating under his skin.

Eventually he changes into a pair of loose sweats and a soft white shirt, exhaustion finally creeping in. He pulls back the covers, ready to crawl into bed and hopefully get a few hours of sleep before another day of pretending everything is fine.

Then, his phone rings. Shane frowns and picks it up.

“Hello?”

“Hey!” Mark shouts into the phone. Shane immediately jerks the phone away from his ear before his eardrum bursts. “Where are you right now?”

“I’m home,” Shane says flatly. Where else would he be after Mark stood him up tonight?

“Good,” Mark giggles. Shane can hear voices and laughter echoing in the background.

“We’re coming back from the bar and we were wondering if we could stop by your place.”

“We?” Shane repeats slowly.

“Yes,” Mark says, words slurring together. “I forgot my key and we wanna keep the party going. So can we come over?”

A cold pit forms in Shane’s stomach. “Who is we?”

“Oh, you know,” Mark says breezily. “Rose, me, and—oh!” He pauses, laughing into the phone. “Ilya too!”

Shane grips the edge of his mattress. “What?” he breathes. “Mark, I don’t—”

No. He should say no. He absolutely should say no. He still hasn't told Mark anything and why the hell is Ilya even with them? Did he say something? Did he tell Mark about the holiday party? About all the other times they flirted? What the hell is happening?

"If you can't," Mark continues casually, "Ilya said we could just go to his place!"

Dear God. That's somehow worse. At least here Shane can keep an eye on Mark. Maybe he can get him to sleep it off. Maybe tomorrow when Mark is sober they can finally have the conversation Shane has been avoiding.

Shane drags a hand down his face. God. Is Ilya stupid? Why is he out drinking with Mark?

"Fine," Shane mutters. "You can come."

"Great!" Mark giggles. "Because we're already in the Uber."

Twenty minutes later, Shane buzzes them up. His hands are almost shaking. He hasn't seen Ilya since the holiday party. The only contact between them since then was that one text message Shane never answered. Will he be angry enough to ruin Shane's plan?

When Shane opens the door, Mark is the first one through, stumbling forward with a huge grin before throwing his arms around Shane.

"Hey, babe!" he slurs, squeezing him tight before pulling back to plant a sloppy kiss on his lips. "We stopped by the LCBO on the way here!"

Rose slips in behind him, holding a cardboard box filled with coolers.

"Hey, Shane," she says brightly. "Thanks for letting us crash."

"No problem," Shane lies automatically. It is absolutely a problem.

He steps back and opens the door wider and Ilya walks in. His eyes are hooded, unreadable. He doesn't look excited the way Mark and Rose do. There's no loud greeting, no drunk enthusiasm. He looks unnervingly calm. It makes something uneasy twist in Shane's stomach, especially when he realizes he can feel heat creeping up his neck.

"Nice place," Ilya says simply.

Rose and Mark wander toward the living room, giggling about something stupid amongst themselves. Shane shuts the door and follows, his pulse beating harder with every step.

Mark drops onto Shane's long brown leather couch, so Shane sits beside him by default and leans against him. Across from them, Rose and Ilya take the two matching love seats. Mark and Rose are already laughing again, rehashing stories from the night about who said what at the bar, who danced with who, who almost spilled a drink. Ilya says nothing.

He's just watching Shane the way a predator watches something it's decided to hunt. Shane feels himself stiffen under Mark's weight. Mark is half slumped against him already, happily sipping from the first cooler he pulled out of the box. It's clear he's drunk out of his mind.

Maybe that's a good thing. Maybe Mark won't notice the tension crackling through the room if he's this drunk.

"Wow, Shane!" Rose laughs, glancing around the apartment. "Your place is so nice. Very modern."

"Thanks," Shane says, flushing slightly.

His eyes flick toward Ilya again, who hasn't touched a single drink.

"Shane's got a bit of a real estate fetish," Mark giggles, taking another sip. "Isn't that right, Shane? Thank God he's got lawyer money."

"I'm not a lawyer yet," Shane mutters, his face heating even more.

He glances back at Ilya but Ilya isn't looking at him anymore. He's looking at Mark. More specifically, at the way Mark is leaning comfortably against Shane.

"Mark told us you two are planning a vacation soon," Rose says, winking at Mark. "Have you picked where you're going yet?"

Shane opens his mouth to answer but Mark beats him to it.

"Oh God, don't start this again," Mark groans dramatically. "We've been talking about this trip for months. It's like pulling teeth."

"Really?" Ilya speaks up suddenly.

Shane's head snaps toward him. What the hell is he doing?

"Yes," Mark says, rolling his eyes. "Apparently he hates beaches."

"I don't hate beaches," Shane snaps quickly, shooting a glare at Ilya. "I just don't love them. I burn easily."

Ilya's mouth curls into a dark little smirk. "You are bad boyfriend, Shane," he says lightly. "Beaches are fun. You would like them."

"See?" Mark gestures lazily toward him. "Ilya gets it! Come on, Shane, what would it take to get you on a beach?"

"Yes, Shane," Ilya adds softly, his eyes locked on him. "You hear your boyfriend? I am right."

God, why is he being such a brat?

Abruptly, Shane stands. He tears his eyes away from Ilya. "I'm gonna get some water," he says quickly.

Shane barely makes it two steps into the kitchen before he hears the quiet sound of footsteps behind him. He doesn't have to turn around to know who it is.

"Don't," Shane mutters under his breath as he reaches the sink.

The footsteps stop just a few feet behind him.

Shane grips the edge of the counter and stares down at the glass he's filling, watching the water spill over the rim before he finally shuts the tap off.

"You're having panic attack," Ilya says quietly from behind him.

Shane exhales sharply and turns around.

"What are you doing?" he demands in a harsh whisper. "Why are you here?"

Ilya leans casually against the kitchen island like he has all the time in the world. His arms cross loosely over his chest.

"Mark invited me," he says simply.

"Why are you out drinking with Mark?" Shane hisses.

"Because he asked me to," Ilya shrugs. "And because we have a lot in common."

Shane rolls his eyes. "Oh, you do? Like what?"

Ilya shrugs, a small smirk curling his lips. "Well, for one thing, we've both sucked your dick."

Shane sucks in a breath, mortified. "Shut up before someone hears you!"

"You mean before Mark hears me," Ilya corrects, looking mildly annoyed. "That's who you're worried about."

"Yes," Shane hisses. "I care if my boyfriend hears another guy say he's sucked my dick."

"I'm guessing that means you haven't told him yet."

"No," Shane snaps. "Is that what you want to hear? I haven't told him." He pauses, pushing off the counter and stepping closer to Ilya. "Is that why you're here? To torture me?"

He watches for Ilya's reaction, and when he catches that smirk again, his anger flares.

"God, you're such an asshole."

"No," Ilya says casually, almost thoughtfully. "I am not the asshole here. You are."

He says it so matter-of-factly that Shane can't help but scoff. "How?"

Ilya pushes off the counter too and folds his arms across his chest.

“You act so very cute,” he says, tilting his head slightly. “Like little bunny. And I cannot help but fall for you.” His voice stays calm, almost conversational. “Meanwhile I am constantly torturing myself, wondering if I should say something to you and break up your relationship. Maybe ruin my job in the process. Then I confess my feelings, and you say you feel the same. I am even nice enough to suck you off.” His eyes narrow slightly. “And still you refuse to break up with your boyfriend. You use me, Hollander. I am starting to feel like a slut.”

Shane fights a blush. Ilya has the audacity to tease him right now. He seems annoyed, yes, but more than that he also seems to be enjoying it. Is this some sick form of foreplay? And worse, why is it working?

“You are a slut.” Shane hears himself say.

Ilya’s eyes darken instantly. “You have two boyfriends right now, Shane,” he says quietly. “And you have the audacity to call me the slut.”

Shane can feel the pull between them like a magnet. Is he seriously getting turned on right now, with his boyfriend in the next room? What the hell has become of him?

“Who says you’re my boyfriend?”

Ilya’s eyes flash. “I do.” His voice drops to a whisper. “And if you want to prove you’re serious about me, prove I am not just another one of your sluts, then you will get down on this kitchen floor and suck my dick.”

The Shane from before he met Ilya would never have done something this humiliating. That Shane had self-respect. He had a job he loved and a boyfriend he tolerated. But that Shane is long gone, killed off somewhere along the way by Ilya’s gorgeous lips and his stupidly sexy Russian accent. So Shane does the only thing that makes sense right now: he drops to his knees.

Shane keeps eye contact with Ilya as he slowly unbuttons his jeans, cheeks flushed and heart pounding. He just keeps thinking *please, please, please*. Please don’t let anyone walk in, at least not before Ilya cums down his throat.

When Ilya’s cock is revealed to him, Shane has to swallow a gasp. It’s pretty fucking huge, bigger than Shane had ever imagined when he allowed his mind to wander there. He leans forward, the hard floor of his kitchen making his knees ache, and his lips kiss just Ilya’s tip. It tastes salty and warm on his lips and Shane licks it, swallowing the drop of pre-cum like it’s the first drop of water in the desert.

“Do you want it,” Ilya asks, his voice low and rough.

Shane nods, looking up at him through his lashes. “Yes,” he answers hoarsely.

“Ask me nicely and I will let you,” Ilya commands, and Shane can feel him twitch against Shane’s lips.

Ilya looks so big from this angle on Shane's knees. "Please, Ilya. Please let me suck your dick."

"But you have a boyfriend," Ilya teases, gripping the base of his cock so he can smear his pre-cum against Shane's lips. "How do I know you're serious about me? Hm?"

"I am serious," Shane whispers, his tongue darting out to lick at the tip of Ilya's cock. "I swear."

"Promise me you're going to break up with him," Ilya says, the teasing edge in his voice fading into something more serious. "I am very selfish, Shane. I do not want to share what is mine."

Shane nods almost immediately. "Tomorrow," he breathes out. "I'll break up with him tomorrow."

"Good boy," Ilya praises. "You can suck my cock now."

Shane straightens his back just a bit and leans in, letting his mouth enclose around Ilya's cock with a small hum. He's warm and thick in Shane's mouth and Shane is dizzy with it all. He takes Ilya to the back of his throat, gagging just a bit before lifting off. He tries again, trying not to look too eager as he licks the underside of Ilya's cock, exploring him, tasting the salt of his body and cum. It's intoxicating frankly, and has Shane feeling floaty again, just like he did in the coat check closet.

"Yes," Ilya moans softly above him. "So good for me."

This encourages Shane a bit, bobbing his head, his jaw relaxing so he can accommodate more of Ilya's cock in his mouth. He takes a few breaths through his nose, trying to remember to breathe, but to be honest, breathing is the last thing on his mind.

One of Ilya's hands cards through Shane's hair and tugs softly. "Good boy for me," he mumbles. "Only for me, right?"

Shane nods with tears in his eyes, his hands coming up to massage Ilya's ball. That seems to do the trick because suddenly, Ilya's hips twitch and he throws his head back and breathes harshly through his nose.

Shane stops, hesitating for a moment when he hears a noise from the living room. Someone is playing music from a speaker. He can faintly hear both Rose and Mark singing along to some song Shane has never heard before and it makes him freeze. God, they really decided on the worst time to be freaks, didn't they?

"Look at me," Ilya demands quietly, and Shane looks back up at him. "Just focus on me, okay? I will do the thinking for you."

Shane groans softly at that, the sound mumbled by Ilya's cock in his mouth. He realizes he's half hard right now and he would be embarrassed if Ilya wasn't such a moaning mess above him.

Shane continues to bob his head, this time a bit harsher now. He gets a bit sloppy with it, spit running down his chin, because he knows they won't have much more time before either Mark or Rose come in to check on them. Getting water only takes so long. So Shane bobs his head fast, quicker, licking and gagging on his dick like he's getting paid for it. He can hear Ilya hiss and groan softly above him, doing all he can to be quiet. Suddenly, he tugs on Shane's hair forcefully enough that he looks up at him again through his lashes.

"I'm gonna cum," Ilya warns. "Where do you want me, *moy lyubimyy*? Down your throat?"

Shane doesn't question what Ilya said in Russian. Right now he has one job and it's to make Ilya cum. He just nods up at him, taking as much of Ilya as he can, gagging on him a bit, waiting to taste his cum. When Ilya ends up cumming down Shane's throat, he feels victorious. It is dirty, with Ilya having to muffle his own groans, and Shane feels like he's won the lottery. He also feels like a complete slut too but he doesn't mind that so much.

Shane sits back on his heels, admiring his handiwork. Ilya is red as a tomato and breathing hard, looking completely fucked out. Shane can't believe it's him who has this effect on Ilya. After a few moments, Ilya is able to catch his breath and helps Shane up to his feet.

"Was it okay?" Shane asks, still needing verbal confirmation he did good.

Ilya gives him a look like he can't possibly be serious as he zips up his pants. Instead of answering, he grabs Shane's face, squishing his cheeks together before planting a proper kiss on his lips. It's a bit sloppy, a little messy with tongue and teeth but when he pulls away, there's such clear adoration in Ilya's eyes that Shane can hear his own heartbeat in his ears.

"Go back into the living room," Ilya finally says, his voice hoarse. "I'll be there in a second."

Shane nods, hesitating for only a moment.

"Ilya..." He swallows thickly as emotion rises in his chest. What the hell is wrong with him? God, only Ilya could make him feel like crying one second and kissing him the next. "You're important to me too, okay? I just..." He sighs. "I don't want to hurt Mark any more than I already know I will."

Ilya nods, like he can see straight into Shane's mind. "I know," he murmurs, pecking Shane's lips once more. "Go back with Mark and Rose. I'm just going to the bathroom first." There's a glint in his eyes. "Need to wash up, okay?"

Shane flushes and nods. "Okay."

When he returns to the living room, there's a calm in his chest that wasn't there before. Rose and Mark are singing Lady Gaga lyrics, trying to guess each song from the first few seconds. They try to get Shane to play, but he's terrible at it. When Ilya comes back, looking a little more composed, he's somehow amazing.

Shane can barely look at him now, but for very different reasons. Instead, he lets himself laugh, lets himself soak in the moment, because he knows tomorrow will change everything.

After another hour or so, Rose is the first to call it a night. She pushes herself up from the loveseat and stretches.

“I think I should go,” she mumbles. “I don’t have to work tomorrow, but I want to sleep in.”

“Ugh, boo,” Mark groans, sprawled across most of the couch. “I work tomorrow.”

“Same,” Ilya says miserably. “But in the afternoon, no?”

Mark shrugs. “Still seven hours though.”

Ilya nods. “Me too.”

“Well, sucks for both of you,” Rose sings as she pulls out her phone and opens the Uber app. She glances at Shane. “You working tomorrow, Shane?”

“Considering it’s Saturday and the office isn’t open—no. I’ve got the day free,” Shane says, standing so he can walk her out.

“Well,” she says as she slips on her shoes, “let me know if you want to do something. We should hang out without Mark sometime.”

“The hell?” Mark whines from the couch.

“Sorry,” Rose giggles, glancing up at Shane as she straps on her heels. “Seriously though—you’re fun. I think we’d get along.”

Shane flushes and nods. “Thanks. I’ll text you.”

Rose kisses his cheek on the way out. When the door closes behind her, Mark pushes himself up from the couch with a long yawn. He wobbles a little, and Shane immediately steps forward to steady him. He can feel Ilya watching. Shane wants to tell him that this means nothing, that tomorrow he’s breaking up with Mark, even if he’s helping him into bed tonight. But his eyes can’t possibly say all that.

“Do you want water?” Shane asks as he guides Mark to his room.

“No,” Mark yawns, wobbling against him. He turns his head slightly, glancing back at Ilya, who’s standing by the door and slipping on his shoes. “Bye, Ilya!”

“Goodbye, Mark.”

In the bedroom, Shane pulls back the covers and helps Mark climb into bed. He’s still wearing his outside clothes, which makes Shane cringe, but he doesn’t offer him anything to change into. It feels wrong to lend Mark his clothes when he knows he’s breaking up with him tomorrow. God, the thought makes him feel a little sick. But he has to do it. Dragging this out any longer would be worse. Shane gives Mark one last look before quietly closing the bedroom door.

When he returns to the living room, Ilya is still standing by the door, shoes on, waiting patiently like he expects something from Shane. It makes Shane chuckle.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t leave without saying goodbye,” Shane says as he walks over to him.

“No,” Ilya says with a small smirk, lifting a hand to cup the side of Shane’s face. “I would never.”

Shane wants to kiss him so badly it almost hurts. But the more they do, the crueller it feels toward Mark. So instead, he just leans his forehead against Ilya’s for a moment, a small smile tugging at his lips.

“Goodnight, Ilya.”

Ilya pulls back and opens the door. “Goodnight, Shane.”

And then he’s gone. The door closes behind him, and with it goes all the warmth in the room.

That night Shane sleeps on the couch, away from Mark. This feels like the better, safer option. He doesn’t want to confuse Mark. Whatever is bubbling inside him, whatever emotion it is, it’s already confusing enough. He feels like a horrible person and definitely a bad boyfriend. But for the first time, he also feels elated. He really, really likes Ilya. More than he’s ever liked anyone, and he feels stupid for fighting it for so long.

When he wakes the next morning, the calm is still there, the same quiet feeling from last night lingering in his chest. He knows it won’t last much longer, so he tries to bask in it. Tries to enjoy it. *Tries* being the key word. Because the moment he opens his eyes, sunlight streaming through the window, he notices Mark standing over him.

Shane gasps, jolting upright. “Fuck!” he blurts. “You scared the shit out of me.”

“You didn’t come to bed,” Mark says, watching him closely, clearly confused.

Dear God. Right when he wakes up? He couldn’t have one more moment of peace? Shane guesses not. He supposes there’s no point delaying the inevitable.

Shane pats the spot beside him on the couch. “Sit down, Mark.”

Mark hesitates, still looking confused, before slowly sitting. “What’s wrong?”

“I think we need to talk,” Shane says seriously.

“About what?” Mark asks, already sounding uncomfortable, like he’s asking a question he knows the answer to.

“I think you know.” Shane tries to speak from the heart. “It’s the reason we can’t decide on a trip. Or whether we’re ever going to live together. I don’t think we’re compatible. I think we should break up.”

Mark looks a little stunned, which Shane expected. “When did you start feeling like this?”

“For a while,” Shane admits. “But I thought... since we’d already spent so much time together, since nothing was really *wrong*, that meant I should be happy. But I think that’s wrong.” He exhales slowly. “I think the longer we stay together just because it’s comfortable, the more we’re doing a disservice to both of us.”

“I could feel it,” Mark says quietly, swallowing. “You’ve been pulling away for a while now. I suggested the vacation because I thought maybe... more time together would help.”

“I don’t think it will,” Shane says honestly. “I think we need to break up.”

Mark takes a long breath. “I mean... you know I don’t want to. But I’m not going to force you to stay with me if you’re unhappy.”

Shane hesitates. God, that’s unexpectedly mature of him. Shane knows he won’t be for the next bit. “There’s something else,” he says carefully. “And I want you to know it’s my fault. It has nothing to do with you. I didn’t want to hurt you—”

“What did you do?” Mark interrupts, his sadness sharpening into confusion.

“I cheated on you.” Shane says in one breath.

“You *what*?” Mark leans forward, anger flashing across his face. “When?”

Shane takes a slow breath. “A few days ago, I guess.”

“You *guess*?” Mark echoes incredulously. “What the hell do you mean, you guess?”

“I mean,” Shane says, trying to clarify as Mark stands and begins pacing the room, “I met this person a few months ago, but nothing actually happened until a few days ago.”

“Who?” Mark grits out. “Who the fuck do you know that I don’t?”

“Mark,” Shane says carefully, trying to stay calm and let him have his reaction because honestly, he deserves it. What Shane did was horrible. He wouldn’t blame Mark for never speaking to him again. “I didn’t do it to hurt you, I swear. I know that makes me sound like an asshole—”

“You think?” Mark scoffs. “Here I am wondering why the hell my boyfriend is pulling away, trying to figure out how to get him to stay, and the whole time you’re out there fucking some guy behind my back.”

“We didn’t fuck,” Shane says automatically. He realizes immediately this probably isn’t helpful, but he feels compelled to clarify.

“Oh, well,” Mark says bitterly, throwing up his hands. “How chivalrous of you.”

He storms out of the living room, and Shane hurries after him.

“Where are you going?” Shane calls.

“To my fucking home!” Mark snaps, slipping on his shoes. “And don’t bother asking if we can be friends right now, Shane. I can barely stand to look at you.”

The words hit harder than Shane expected. The door slams behind him, making Shane flinch. Well, that went about as well as he’d expected.

Shane stands there for a moment after the door slams, staring at it like Mark might suddenly come back. His chest feels tight. His throat burns. He presses his lips together hard, blinking quickly. The last thing he wants right now is to start crying. Not because Mark left—he knew that would happen—but because he disappointed someone.

“Fuck,” he mutters under his breath. The apartment suddenly feels too quiet.

Shane drags a hand over his face and forces himself to move. Standing there isn’t going to help anything. If anything, the silence will just make everything worse.

So he starts cleaning. The coffee table is still littered with empty glasses and half-crushed beer cans from the night before. He gathers them up, stacking them awkwardly in his arms before carrying them to the kitchen. The sink fills quickly. He runs the tap, rinsing them out without really thinking. There are crumbs on the counter too where he spilled something sticky near the stove. He wipes it down with a paper towel, scrubbing harder than necessary.

His movements are quick, almost frantic. Like if he keeps moving, he won’t have to think about the look on Mark’s face.

Shane exhales slowly and drops the last can into the recycling bin.

The apartment is still quiet. He reaches for his phone before he can talk himself out of it. There’s already a message thread open with Ilya. Shane stares at it for a second, his thumb hovering over the keyboard. For a moment he wonders if he should wait. If texting him right now somehow makes everything worse.

Shane types out a simple message anyways.

I told him.

He stares at the message for another second before hitting send. The little bubble disappears up the screen, and Shane leans back against the counter, exhaling slowly. Ilya’s shift just started if Shane remembers correctly so he doubts he’ll see this until his break in a few hours. Still, it comforts Shane to know that Ilya will eventually read it.

Shane is still looking at his phone as he walks into the kitchen, suddenly starving after all the cleaning. He’s scrolling through Instagram, searching for Rose’s profile. She might not feel the same once she finds out about him and Ilya, but maybe she’ll still want to hang out. Shane hopes she will. He’s distracted, though, scrolling through her posts with one hand while reaching into the cupboard for a glass with the other. He’s not usually this clumsy, but today has drained every ounce of energy out of him.

He misjudges the distance to the counter and the glass slips from his fingers. It shatters against the edge of the counter and the floor and some of the shards break in his hand.

“Fuck!” Shane hisses, jerking back.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

He’s bleeding. Like really bleeding.

He’s never had stitches before, but he assumes this is probably the kind of bleeding that requires them. His palm throbs as dark red blood pours from the cut, deeper and heavier than any bleeding he’s ever seen before.

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” he mutters. Can this day get any worse?

He shoves his phone into his pocket and grabs a dish towel, pressing it hard against his palm. He waits a few seconds, applying pressure and hoping that does the trick. When he pulls it away, blood immediately wells up again and now the towel is soaked too. Great.

Shane suddenly feels sweaty, weak, too, and a little lightheaded. He stares down at his hand, wondering how the hell one stupid glass could do this much damage.

Does he need to go to the hospital? Surely not. Surely he doesn’t have to go to the fucking emergency room where his ex-boyfriend and current—well, kind-of boyfriend—both work. There has to be another ER he can go to. Except... the one Ilya works at is the closest. And if he really does need stitches, shouldn’t he just go there?

“Fuck it,” Shane mutters.

He pulls his phone out with his good hand and taps Ilya’s contact. Maybe he can just ask him and maybe Ilya will say he doesn’t need to come in.

The phone rings three times before it goes to his voicemail.

“Hello, this is Ilya, and I will never listen to your voicemail—”

Shane hangs up.

Fuck it. He’s trying to stay calm, but he suddenly feels dangerously close to fainting. His body is shaking with adrenaline, and the sight of the blood isn’t helping.

Yeah, he definitely needs to go to the hospital.

Shane knows he shouldn’t drive himself. He should call his parents, a friend, literally anyone, but he doesn’t want to inconvenience anyone, especially if he doesn’t actually need stitches.

Still holding onto that hope, he gets into his car and drives with one hand, which is absolutely not recommended. He’s in so much pain. Holy fuck. Why is there so much blood? Is he anemic? He surely feels anemic right now.

He parks like an asshole in the parking lot, almost like he's parking horizontally, and Shane winces. It'll have to do for now. Jesus Christ. He's bleeding through the towel. Is his skin made of paper? Why is this happening?

The moment he walks through the ER doors, he realizes he's actually never been inside before. He'd always waited outside for Mark, too scared to see the blood, the mangled limbs, the crying families.

It's... kind of nice. The walls are stark white, and it smells almost violently antiseptic but it is clean and pretty dead right now, which Shane is thankful for. He approaches the front desk, feeling small and embarrassed, already bracing for how stupid he'll sound when he explains what happened.

The nurse looks up from her computer, offering a kind smile. "Hello, how can I help you?"

"Uh..." Shane's throat is suddenly dry. "Is Ilya Rozanov here?"

Because really, that's who he wants. Not some random doctor or resident, and definitely not Mark. He wants Ilya, not just to stitch him up if necessary, but to be there. Just his presence alone might calm him.

The nurse frowns slightly. "Uh, I think so. He just clocked in. Are you—"

Her eyes drop to Shane's hands, and he follows her gaze. Oh, right. He's still bleeding through the towel. Shit.

"Oh," she says, standing and rounding the desk. She lifts Shane's hand, pulling back the towel. He winces immediately. "Looks like you're going to need stitches," she says. Shane feels the weight of it hit him, and for a moment, he just wants to cry.

"Can you—" Shane stops himself, swallowing hard, trying to take a steadying breath so he doesn't start crying. "Can you page Ilya Rozanov? I—I'm a friend of his, I guess, and he'll probably kill me if someone doesn't let him know I'm here."

The nurse looks at him with such warmth it makes his chest tighten. "Of course. Did you want a wheelchair?"

Shane shakes his head. "No—"

"Shane?"

He whips his head toward the voice. About six feet away, wearing those navy scrubs he likes, is Ilya. He looks frozen for a moment, taking in Shane's clammy, pale skin, then following his gaze to the blood-soaked towel in Shane's hand. Before Shane can even speak, Ilya is rushing toward him.

"What happened? Are you alright?" Both of Ilya's hands land on Shane's shoulders, and warmth floods him instantly. Thank God. He already feels better just being near him.

"I'm fine," Shane sighs. "I cut myself when I dropped a glass, is all."

“Let me see.” Ilya rubs gentle circles on Shane’s arm before taking his hand. Even if it’s a bad cut, Ilya doesn’t flinch. He just nods calmly, then looks up past Shane to the nurse.

“Nadine,” Ilya says, his voice low, controlled, and just deep enough to make Shane’s cheeks flush. “I’m bringing Shane to room five. Can you bring me a suture kit?”

Shane can’t look away. He doesn’t notice Nadine nod, but she must have because Ilya is already guiding him toward a private room.

“Do all your patients get such a nice room, or am I special?” Shane asks, trying to sound casual, though his voice comes out shaky.

“You are special, of course,” Ilya replies with a smirk, suddenly looking like himself again. He guides Shane to the bed, and Shane sits carefully, the paper crinkling beneath him.

“You know,” Ilya begins, washing his hands at the sink, “if you wanted to visit me, you didn’t have to cut your hand. My break is at three.”

Shane rolls his eyes, though he can’t help the small smile tugging at his lips. Maybe his bedside manner actually *is* impeccable. “Fuck off.”

Nadine enters the room, rolling in a suture kit on a small trolley as Ilya slips on his gloves. He nods politely at her, offering a brief, professional smile, then turns his attention back to Shane. The nurse squints at Shane for a moment, like she might recognize him, then shakes her head and looks away. Oh, right. He used to date Mark.

Ilya settles onto the tiny wheeled chair in front of Shane and opens the suture kit. Antiseptic, a needle, sutures are all laid out neatly. Shane swallows hard. He’s always been terrible with blood. How the hell is he going to get through this?

“Hey,” Ilya says calmly, catching Shane’s gaze. “I’ll numb you first, so it won’t hurt. Don’t worry.”

Shane’s throat tightens. “How many times have you done this?” he asks nervously.

Ilya smirks. “I’m licensed, Shane. If that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Shut up,” Shane mutters, shaking his head.

Ilya smirks again, leaning over Shane’s hand, which rests on the clean desk beside the bed. “Okay. Let me see the wound properly.”

Shane holds his hand out reluctantly, his palm still trembling. He can feel the blood seeping through the towel again, and every time he looks at it, his stomach churns.

“Relax,” Ilya says softly, his thumb brushing against Shane’s wrist as he carefully unwraps the towel. The touch is so light that Shane nearly forgets to breathe. “I’m gonna clean it first.”

Ilya's fingers are gentle as he cleans the cut, wiping away the blood. He's trying his best not to move but the antiseptic stings and it makes him wince every time Ilya touches the wound.

"You okay?" Ilya asks, eyes flicking up to Shane's face.

"Yeah," Shane lies, though his voice cracks. "I—just hurts."

"I know," Ilya says quietly, his tone softer now. He presses a gauze pad over the wound, then folds it carefully, holding Shane's hand as he works. Shane's fingers twitch, but Ilya doesn't flinch, doesn't pull away.

Ilya lifts the gauze once again and holds it up, inspecting the wound. "You're going to need a couple of stitches, but it's not so bad."

Shane nods. "Thanks."

The next thing Ilya does is numb the area. He takes out a thin needle from the tray and turns back to Shane, looking so composed it puts him at ease a bit. "This is lidocaine. It's gonna numb everything so you won't feel me stitching you up."

Shane nods, a little reassured. He's not sure if Ilya is doing it on purpose, but explaining each step is strangely comforting, especially for Shane, who likes to feel in control. "Okay," he murmurs.

When Ilya injects the needle, there's a sharp sting, but it's brief. Shane takes a few deep breaths, gritting his teeth, and soon it's done. Ilya disposes of the needle in a bin before sitting back down in front of him.

"Now we wait a few minutes for it to kick in," he nods.

Shane flushes a bit, watching him work. It's strange and oddly thrilling seeing Ilya at work, in his element. A thought bubbles up, and he wonders how Ilya decided on medicine. These are questions he can finally ask now that they're... well, together.

"What made you want to be a doctor?" Shane asks, curiosity threading through his voice.

Ilya's eyes soften, and Shane feels himself relax just a little more. "I should be asking *you* questions to ease your mind," he replies.

Shane gives him a pointed look. "I'm the patient. What I say goes."

"Hm," Ilya says, amused. "Not unlike your everyday life then, yes?"

"Are you calling me bossy?" Shane scoffs.

"No, never," Ilya says, amusement flashing in his eyes. "But I know you like order. You like things a certain way."

"Yes," Shane admits, a faint laugh escaping him. "I love order and I kinda hate chaos. Which is why my attraction to you is so confusing."

Ilya chuckles. “Oh? You’re attracted to me?”

Shane flushes, heat creeping up his neck. “Yes,” he says quickly, before adding, “Don’t change the subject. Tell me why you wanted to become a doctor.”

Ilya exhales slowly. “Okay,” he finally agrees. “I wanted to become a doctor because of my mom.” He pauses, and Shane notices something flicker in his eyes. “She was very sick when I was growing up.”

“Sick... like cancer?” Shane asks, frowning.

Ilya shakes his head, quiet for a moment before speaking. “No... sick in the head. She was depressed, probably bipolar. But in Russia, they had no words for it. My father just called her crazy, lazy, stupid. She... she took her own life when I was twelve. After that, I decided I wanted to help people suffering like she did.”

Shane swallows hard. His hand might be numb, but his chest feels like it’s expanding with love and awe for Ilya. God. He loves Ilya.

“In the fall, I’m going to specialize in the mental health ward here,” Ilya continues. “So I can help people like my mom.”

Shane sucks in a breath, voice thick with emotion. “That’s... amazing, Ilya. I’m so sorry you lost her, but she raised an incredible person who’s already helping so many.”

Ilya’s eyes shine, and he takes a steadying breath. “Well... she wouldn’t be too happy with me if I didn’t stitch you up today. The lidocaine must be working now.”

Ilya picks up the needle and thread, sliding on a fresh pair of gloves. Shane’s stomach tightens, adrenaline and nerves tangling together. His hand is numb from the lidocaine, but his whole body feels like it’s on edge.

“Alright,” Ilya says softly, meeting Shane’s eyes for a moment before leaning closer. “We’re going to take this one stitch at a time. You’ll barely feel it.”

Shane swallows hard and nods, trying to focus on anything but how close Ilya is. His fingers tremble slightly, but Ilya’s steadying hand on his wrist keeps them in place.

The first pinch barely hurts but Shane flinches instinctively. Ilya’s thumb brushes the back of his hand, gentle and grounding. “Shh... breathe. That’s it. You’re doing fine,” he murmurs.

Shane tries. His chest tightens, his heart thundering in his ears. He can feel the heat radiating off Ilya’s arms, the subtle scent of his cologne mixed with antiseptic, and it’s enough to make his knees feel weak.

Finally, Ilya leans back just slightly, inspecting the wound. “All done,” he says.

“Already?” Shane asks, clearly surprised.

When he looks down at his finger, he realizes that it was only four stitches. Shane exhales shakily, feeling a mix of relief and awe. He looks down at his hand, now bandaged, then up at Ilya, who's calmly cleaning up his station.

"Didn't hurt too badly," Shane murmurs, trying for a casual tone that sounds absurdly small in his ears.

"Good," Ilya replies, voice low, a faint smirk tugging at his lips. "Why don't I get you a cup of water or something for being such a good boy?"

Shane's cheeks heat up, a rush of warmth crawling up his neck. "O-okay..." he stammers, voice small.

Before he can process it, Ilya leans in, catching him off guard with a quick, soft peck on his lips. "Alright," Ilya murmurs, a faint, teasing smile tugging at his lips. "I'll be right back."

Shane leans back against the bed as Ilya leaves, letting out a slow breath. The room is quiet now, the antiseptic smell still faint in the air, and for the first time all day, he feels content. His chest feels light, even though his hand still aches faintly. The peck from Ilya lingers on his skin and he can feel the warmth of it crawling up his neck. Woah. Shane is in love. Shane is in love with Ilya. Shane has never really been in love, it never felt right to use that word but he feels it so deeply right now. Hearing him talk about his mom, seeing how caring he is, and even last night makes Shane realize he might have been in love with Ilya for a while now.

The door swings open suddenly, and Shane startles, blinking up at the figure in the doorway. It's Mark.

"Mark," Shane breathes, eyes widening. He straightens immediately, trying to act casual, though his chest is hammering in panic. "I—I didn't expect you... uh..."

Mark frowns, looking confused as his gaze sweeps the room. "I thought... uh, one of the nurses said my boyfriend was here?"

Shane swallows hard. His heart hammers in his throat, and a part of him wants to vanish. But he forces himself to stay still, hand pressed against his chest where it feels like it's trying to escape. "Yeah... um. That's—uh, not exactly right," he stammers. "I mean, no, that's not... he—"

Mark steps further inside, eyes scanning Shane's pale face and his bandaged hand. He doesn't look angry like he did this morning, more confused than anything. "What happened to your hand?"

Shane exhales shakily. "I... I cut it when I dropped a glass. It's fine. I'm already stitched up."

"By who?" Mark presses, a note of suspicion creeping in.

And then, as if the universe had it out for him, Ilya Rozanov walks back in, a cup of water in one hand. The moment he sees Mark, he freezes, eyes flicking between Shane and Mark,

hesitating mid-step.

“Is... everything okay?” Ilya asks carefully, planting himself on the opposite side of Shane.

“No, actually,” Mark huffs, frustration flaring. “Nadine told me my boyfriend was here getting stitched up by you. So... what the fuck is going on?”

Ilya glances down at Shane, eyebrow raised. “I thought you told him.”

“I did,” Shane murmurs, heart hammering, “but—”

“Wait,” Mark interrupts, eyes darting frantically between Shane and Ilya. “Wait, *wait*.”

“Then why does he look so confused?” Ilya asks, calm but firm, staring down at Shane.

“He... he left before I could tell him it was you,” Shane admits, his voice tight. No, no. This was not how he was supposed to find out. *No*.

“Wait!” Mark yells, narrowing his eyes at Shane. “Are you telling me the man you’ve been cheating on me with is Rozanov?”

Shane clears his throat, voice trembling. “Mark—”

“Because if that’s true, I’m gonna lose my fucking mind!” Mark roars, and Shane flinches, afraid his ex might actually explode.

“Hey,” Ilya interjects, his voice flat, calm. “Don’t yell at him.”

“Fuck you!” Mark spits, pivoting back to Shane, fury blazing in his eyes. “You’re... you’re fucking Rozanov? Him? You’ve got to be kidding me! You’re leaving me for this... this slut who’ll fuck anything with legs? This has to be a joke!”

Shane feels a hot, bitter anger rise in his chest now. “It’s not a fucking joke, Mark! I love him! I know that’s not what you want to hear, but—”

“Fuck you!” Mark interrupts again, voice sharp, accusatory. “You’re sick!”

“Mark,” Ilya says, calm as ever, his tone firm but measured, “I said don’t yell at him.”

Mark glares, teeth gritted. “Okay... fine. I’ll yell at you!”

“No,” Ilya says, calm as ever. “You won’t. You’re going to go outside, get some fresh air, and take a break.”

Shane can’t believe it. His chest is pounding, sweat trickling down his sides, and yet Ilya doesn’t even flinch. It’s like the world could be collapsing and he’d still be perfectly composed. Shane’s mind races. How is he so calm?

Mark looks just as shocked by Ilya’s composure. “No, we’re going outside because I’m gonna punch you.”

“No!” Shane yells, springing from the bed, panic and desperation fueling him.

Ilya crosses his arms, eyes steady, voice unshakable. “No, you’re not. You’ll lose your job if you do that, and then what? How would that solve anything? Trust me, you won’t feel better by punching me. Just ask Nadine to cover your patients and go outside. Take a breath.”

Mark lets out a bitter laugh, and for a second, Shane thinks he might actually swing. But then Mark hesitates, visibly trying to reign himself in. He pivots slightly, jaw tight, and locks eyes on Shane.

“I can’t... fucking believe you,” he mutters.

When Mark storms out, Shane finally lets himself exhale. Holy fucking shit. He’s shaking. His entire body is shaking. That was not how he wanted any of this to go. He knew Mark would be angry, knew he’d probably yell, but he’d hoped it wouldn’t be in public like this, in front of patients, nurses. Heat floods his face at the thought of walking out there and meeting anyone’s eyes. God. He’s never going to recover from this.

“Shane,” Ilya says carefully, pulling him out of the spiral. “Are you okay?”

Shane looks at him and exhales. “No—yeah, it’s just...” He shakes his head, forcing himself not to cry. It’s been a long day, and it’s still not over.

But when he looks at Ilya, the words die in his throat. Ilya is smiling, wide and bright, showing all of his teeth.

Shane blinks. “What?”

Ilya just shakes his head, grin widening. “You love me?”

Shane freezes. Right. He did say that. Not exactly how he pictured it happening. He had wanted to wait, sit in that feeling for a bit longer. He had definitely not wanted to shout it out in the heat of the moment, but honestly, when has anything ever gone according to plan?

“Is that seriously all you got out of that?” Shane asks, shaking his head, though his voice is softer now. The warmth of Ilya’s gaze grounds him. “My ex almost punched you, caused a scene at your job, and all you heard was that I said I love you?”

Ilya shrugs, stepping closer, his hands settling on Shane’s waist. “Well,” he murmurs, eyes searching his, “do you?”

Shane knows he should fight the urge, but he’s so tired of fighting. “Yes,” he says, his voice thick with emotion. “I love you. Happy?”

“Yes,” Ilya nods, leaning in and giving Shane a slow, searing kiss. When Ilya pulls back, his smile is softer now, but no less sure. “I love you too, Shane.”

The way he says his name makes something in Shane’s chest tighten. It reminded Shane of the first time he had said it all those weeks ago. He had said it so seriously, so intensely, it had made Shane question his own name. Back then, he’d thought about all the pieces that

made him who he was. The dutiful son. The loyal friend. The safe, predictable version of himself. But now he had a new part of himself that made up who he was; being Ilya's. And, God, didn't that feel wonderful.

Shane actually does end up taking that all inclusive trip. Ilya had been right, of course. He does love the beach. The sun, the warmth, the endless stretch of water... it's all better than he expected. But what surprises him more is how much he enjoys everything when he's with Ilya. Turns out, it's not really about the place at all but about who you spend it with.

Not that they spend much time on the beach. Shane claims he doesn't want to get sunburnt, and that's partially true, but the real reason is that their bedroom is far more enticing.

"We should go..." Shane breathes out, biting down on Ilya's thumb. His eyes were hooded, head leaned so far back it's resting in the crook of Ilya's shoulder.

He can feel Ilya smirk against his ear. "Hm, no. I think we should stay here." His hip twitches just slightly, enough to tease Shane, who moans out loud. God, no matter how many times they fuck Ilya still feels so big. "Think I want to see you cum on my cock once more before we go to the beach."

Shane whimpers at the loss of Ilya's cock as he slides out of Shane's hole, before slamming right back in. Of all their positions, this one is Shane's favourite; on their side, Shane's back pressed against Ilya's front. He felt cocooned like this in Ilya's warmth. Yeah... they weren't leaving for a while.

"Ilya..." Shane moaned again, grinding his hips down to meet Ilya's thrust. "Please..."

"Please what?" Ilya craned his head, kissing and biting down the length of Shane's neck. "Please fuck me harder? Please stop?"

Shane forces his eyes open a little wider and turns his head, just enough to look at Ilya. His blonde curls are a mess, sticking out in every direction, catching the Caribbean sunlight spilling through the window and turning almost golden. Ilya lifts his head from Shane's neck, his face flushed red, his eyes heavy-lidded. He looks dazed, almost drunk. Drunk on Shane.

Shane's stomach clenches in shock. God, he's so wonderful.

Shane tilts his head up, closing the distance and kissing him deeply. Ilya responds instantly, just as intense, his tongue exploring Shane's mouth. It overwhelms Shane. His throat feels thick, like he might actually cry from it. There's too much inside him, too much he wants to say, but words feel impossible right now. So, instead, he pulls back just barely, breath uneven, and nods faintly.

"Please..." he whines. "More..."

And, of course, Ilya obeys.

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